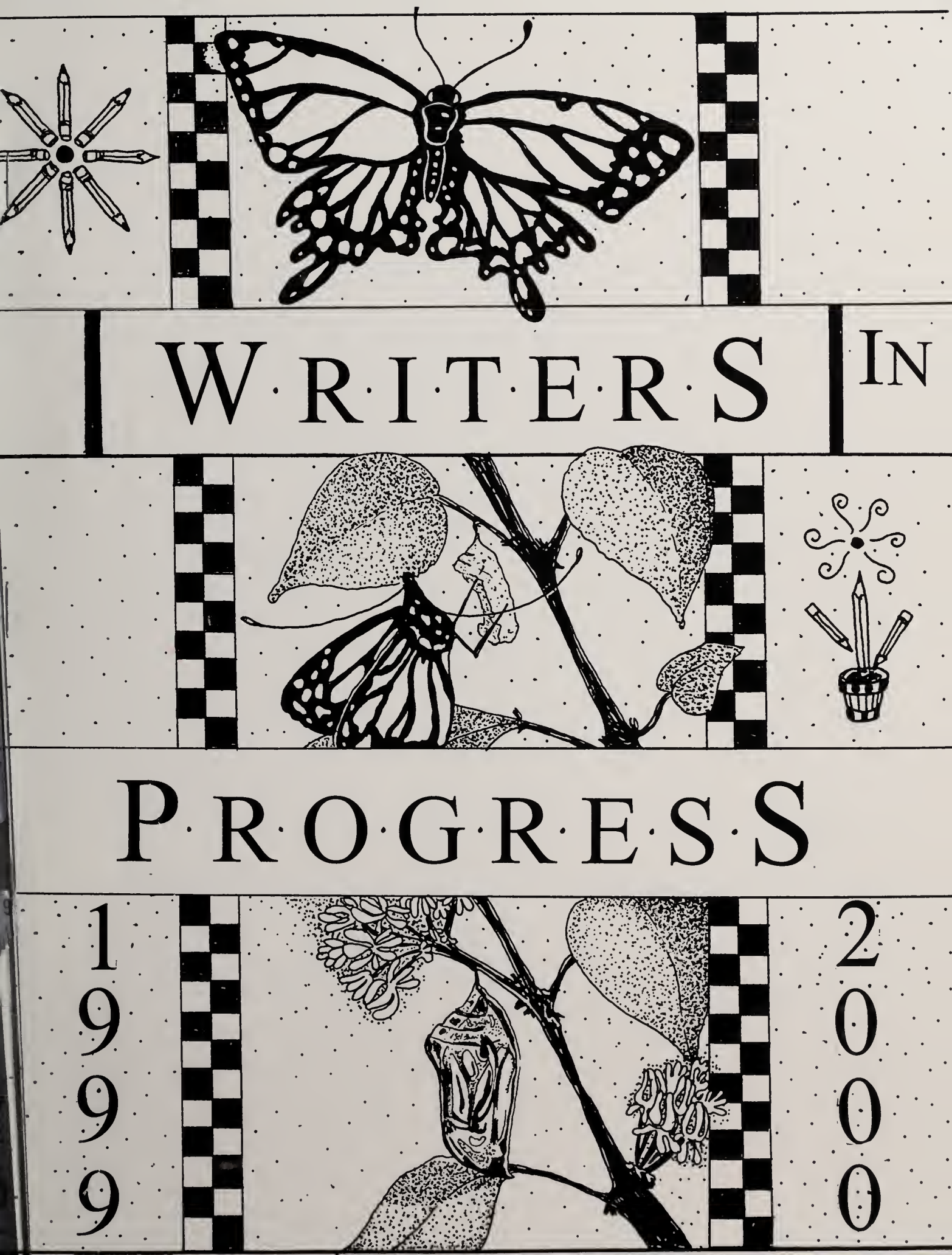

WRITERS IN PROGRESS

1999 2000

Writers in Progress

is a publication of

The Writing Center
Northern Essex Community College
Haverhill, Massachusetts
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The 1999-2000 edition of Writers in Progress *was accomplished on a Dell Dimension XPS T500, using Microsoft Office and an HP laser printer.*

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Special thanks to:

Basic Writing student contributors; Basic Writing faculty; Diane Gori, Writing Center Coordinator; Joanna Fortna, Curriculum Coordinator for Basic Writing; David Kelley, Ed.D, Associate Dean, Division of Instructional Support; Patricia McDermott, Director, Developmental Studies; the PACE and Voc-Ed programs.

Dedication

To all the students who think they can't,
and all the students who know they can.

Because of the large number of submissions we receive each year, we are faced with the difficult task of choosing which papers to publish. Space limitations prevent us from printing every paper we receive. We apologize, because we believe that every writer who has had the courage and pride to offer his or her work for publication deserves recognition. This issue is dedicated to all of you.

We honor submissions from:

- Esteban Alvarez
- Victoria Alvarez
- Luz Baez
- Nancy Byron
- Michael Georgopolis
- Christian Grullon
- Julia Helbich
- Joseph Marrone
- Scott McIntyre
- Wilda Mendez
- William Moschetto
- Edward Nuesi
- Steven Paine
- Tho Phung
- Maria Nieves Rios-Moya
- Jessica Rivera
- Maria Sainz
- Ken Samoisette
- Roberta Smith
- Fred Stuart
- Marcos Suriel
- Ivelisse Torres
- Sarah Wheeler
- Juan Yagual

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Introduction

> We don't necessarily have to change our lives around to be writers or to be writing more. We must change the way we look at our lives. By looking at the small, everyday circumstances and happenings, we find ideas to fill volumes.
>
> —Georgia Heard, *Writing Toward Home*

Most people who don't write believe it comes easy for those who do. They believe only a select few—as if by magic—can see the world in words. But the writers contained in this anthology know better. They know the real magic in writing comes in recognizing themselves as storytellers, in recognizing themselves as people, like you, who have important things to reveal about their lives and the world around them.

Once these writers recognized themselves as storytellers they suddenly found "ideas to fill volumes." They found their life stories hidden in the most unexpected, everyday places. While some found their stories in a grandfather's flaming red hair, or in the "scruffy smile" worn by an "unkempt man," others found them lying in the soft green grass of a lazy fishing spot, or in the shadows seen by a blind girl, or in the smell of fresh paint and clean sheets. Some even found them lurking in the must old fabric of a second hand Santa Claus suit, and others still in the swirling, bold letters of graffiti smeared across a subway car. In short, where you look, these writers seem to suggest, is where you will find the magic of your story.

Be warned, however: cultivating faith in your own magic is tricky business. At first you must believe in the unseen potential you have tucked deep inside of you, as a caterpillar must in the unseen butterfly wings tucked deep inside its small, slender body. Like a caterpillar, you must trust in the process of discovering your unseen butterfly wings as a writer. Let this faith in the unseen allow you to be patient with yourself, let it allow you to take the risks you need to fly, and, above all, let it allow you to release your story.

Some say stories beget stories and that is the hope of this anthology. The hope is that the stories unleashed on the following pages will unleash your own. This anthology dares you to see your world in words. It begs you to take your turn as the storyteller. So look around inside the deep pockets and corners of your life or in between the cracks of your memories in search of your story.

After all, the next generation of Basic Writers begins with you.

Best wishes,
Clare Thompson
May 2000

Gone Fishing
by Bruce Powers

In the summer of 1964, I was just a boy growing up in a small New Hampshire town. As in many small communities back then, most of us children attended the same school and would play together in our free time. Baseball and soccer were favorite pastimes. Sometimes, if the spirit moved us, we would go for a visit to what we called the "Haunted House," but that is another story.

Because my parents were divorced, my home life was somewhat different from the rest of my friends. My mother worked, so she was not around a lot. This turn of events left my older sister "in charge," or so she thought. Actually, it was my oldest brother Randy who really was in charge, so to speak. It didn't matter much to me one way or the other because I did whatever I wanted anyway. When luck would have it that they were both away, a time I was always waiting for, I would pursue my favorite pastime. I would grab my trusty blue fishin' rod with the black spinning reel and be on my way to the river.

The river itself was a ways off, but that didn't bother me all that much because getting there was half the fun. The first part of the walk led me past giant swale grass that grew to be eight feet tall. Luckily, the grass was soft. What was so scary about it was that I could not see anything in front of me, or behind me, so I would have to rely on my sense of direction to get through it. This all made me feel as if I was a true explorer, blazing trails through the wilderness. I would also have to cross some railroad tracks on the way. I can remember the distinctive smell of the creosote-coated railroad ties as they basked in the summer sun. I always had a fascination with the tracks, and looking back on it now, I see that they may have influenced my yearning to be on the move.

As I made my approach, ever nearer to the river, the very first harbinger would be the noise of the waterfalls. The waterfalls were loud like cannons. The water there moves so fast that if I watched it for any length of time, I would be mesmerized. The way the water smashes hard against the rocks reminded me of a washing machine full of suds. The smell of the water would be all around. On the other side of the river, I could see the houses and apartment buildings of the neighboring town. There was an old brick factory of some kind too. They all had looked as though they had seen better days. It looked somewhat similar to my

town, and little did I know at the time I would be living there someday. Upriver, all there was to see was more water flowing down within the riverbanks that the river had long ago formed on its journey to the sea.

Down the river, there was a great big steel and cement bridge that I would have to cross going back and forth to school. The bridge could be scary too and for some reason it made me feel like I was going to fall right through it.

The spot where I fished from had a few trees on both sides of me. Thinking back, I believe they must have been hemlock trees, because I remember the leaves. The sun was out but the temperature was not too hot. School was out for the day so I was glad about that. Everything was green and lush around the riverbank, the trees and grass and what have you. I remember the tiger lilies too. There was only one thing about the trees that was not so good. However nice the trees looked, they gave me back twice as much trouble. The trees taught me how to get the knots out of my line and encouraged me to improve my casting skills. Besides the trees, there was also stuff in the water to get my line around. Not only were there rocks and branches, but also a shopping cart, some bottles, and an old rim and tire. Nevertheless, there were fish in the river; I could see them. I would run my line out and of course I would get a fish. The challenge was to land it. Considering all I had to go through to get a fish, in and out of the water, I was to become a town renowned fisherman. Eventually I would run out of bait, or the little flies would start attacking me, or perhaps I would just get lonely, and so it would be time to go home. I did not want to make that journey in the dark, that is for sure. Besides, I had to leave *some* fish in the river for next time.

Bruce Powers is a forty-two-year-old native of Morrisville, Vermont, and is currently a Business Management major. As a student of Joanna Fortna in the fall of 1999, Bruce found, in learning to write, he had a "great imagination." As a child and now as an adult, Bruce continues to inspire his imagination by being outdoors. Between classes, he can often be found walking around Kenoza Lake.

The Good Old Yard

by Yjannette Ortiz

As I am looking through my porch window, I look across my yard and driveway and stare at the house next door. It has white siding and a broken water pipe. As it continues to rain, the water shoots out from the water pipe like a waterfall. When I look towards the left, there is our two-door garage. It is made of bricks and is painted an ugly shade of mint green. The roof of the garage is broken, so the rain manages to sneak in there. The water flows like a river out of the garage and onto the cement driveway. In certain spots of the driveway there are cracks and potholes, so it looks like little rivers flowing into a pond.

Continuing down my driveway, the river of water runs down into the street. The street is filled with garbage, old editions of the *Lawrence Eagle Tribune* and broken glass. It is also infested with crime and violence. But today, there are no criminals, dealers, or troublemakers around (they seem to go away when it rains). I guess the rain cleans the dirt and scum of the earth.

As I continue back into my yard, there is a long metal fence separating the street and the yard. My dog, Alley, is usually out in the yard protecting her territory, but due to the rain, she's inside. The yard is filled with holes caused by the dog. My father told me the reason why she digs is because the dirt is cold, so she does it to keep cool. I think she does it because she gets really bored and has nothing else to do.

Towards the house, there are three bushes and two trees. Two of the three bushes grow in the middle of the yard. Both grow a reddish-orange kind of flower with yellow pollen in the middle. The other bush is a rose bush; my mother loves that bush. The roses are bright red and the leaves and stems are a beautiful shade of forest green. The vines are long and have prickly, sharp thorns. The vines creep up and wrap around the white terrace. In between the rose bush and the terrace, there is a small wooden fence that separates the yard and the walkway. The cement walkway runs from the metal fence in the front to the wooden fence separating our yard from the neighbor's house and yard. The two trees are located right on the side of the wooden fence. The smaller of the two is on the right side of the rose bush. It has a strong base, but the body and the branches are pretty weak. They hang lifeless on the side of the tree's base. The big tree is as big as my house, maybe even bigger. The big tree blocks the sun from going into the house. Both trees grow little green and brown pears and white flowers.

There is a little garden located along the side of the house. It doesn't have anything growing in there; the only thing in the garden is dirt. Before we bought the house, there were beautiful flowers growing there. But now there's not one flower, because no one in our family knows how to grow or take care of plants and flowers. You can say that we don't have much of a "green thumb"!

On either side of the empty garden, there are two ceramic Easter bunnies. The bunnies were here before we moved into this house. I guess the people that lived here before didn't want them. But I couldn't imagine why they didn't like them. They are so adorable. Both rabbits are at least a couple of inches tall. The male rabbit has a carved bow tie on and a basket. The female has a dress carved on her body, a bow on her head and also a basket. Both baskets are overflowing with water. The texture of the bunnies is smooth. The appearance isn't so great. The beautiful pastel colors that were there before seem to have faded away and made the bunnies seem sad and soulless.

Other objects that are filling up with water are the trash barrels along side of the garage. I would flip the barrels over, but they have trash in them. On the side of the barrels there is a white, glass table with four chairs towards the end of the walkway. The table belonged to my great-grandmother who passed away this summer. The memory of her and her friends and family playing games, such as cards, dominos and bingo, comes to mind. The table was given to my mother shortly after the funeral. The table hasn't been used since it got here. I guess we are still in mourning for our great-grandmother, so we leave it untouched and unused.

Now I am focusing on the outline of the window on my porch. The frame is painted white and has lots of cracks.

I look at the overview of my yard; it is really peaceful sitting here and watching the rainfall, making the streets clean and safe, and smelling the fresh clean air as the wind blows it softly to the porch. Hopefully it's like this all week, so I can experience this over and over again.

Yjannette Ortiz is a nineteen-year-old Business Management major at NECC. She is currently a work study student at the Lazarus House. Before taking Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course in the fall of 1999, Yjannette felt she "wasn't much of a writer." However, now, after taking her writing course, she says, "I learned that I am a writer." Outside of work and school, Yjannette likes to listen to music and collect Barbie dolls.

Picture Perfect
by Douglas Owens

It was nine o'clock in the morning, February 13, 1998, and the annoying buzzing sound from the alarm clock had just gone off. I opened my weary eyes and a warm bright ray of light came in from the window and hit my face. In the background, I could hear the birds chirping their content little hearts away. Slowly I rolled out of the hotel bed as my tired body was finally waking up. I clumsily stumbled towards the window where the bright ray of light was coming from, wondering with excitement if the day was going to be a good one. Finally, I pulled the shade away from the window to see a beautiful clear sky at Attitash Bear Peak Mountain, in Bartlett, NH. It is one of my favorite places that I admire the most.

A cool breeze rushed my face as I fastened my skis down. I was so hot that sweat was running down my face from rushing to get dressed and head outside. It was cold outside, yet the sun was out. There was not a cloud in sight. The snow glowed as the sun shone off of it, as if it was made of gold. The trees were covered with white fluffy snow. It was like I was in a dream. In my mind, all I could think of was getting on the gondola as fast as possible to get on the highest peak.

My heart started to race as I was getting closer to the top. The view was incredible as I was going up in the gondola. The trails looked so small that they took the form of ant trails on an ant farm. The gondola was swaying back and forth as the roaring, whistling winds brushed against the bubble-shaped body of the gondola. Finally, there I was on the top of the snow-capped mountain. It was the most fantastic view I had ever seen. A small breeze blew by me, as I smelled a strong scent of fresh pine from the pine trees that partially covered the mountain. The sky was light blue where the fluffy clouds looked like fish swimming in a monstrous sea. I felt that I was on top of the world, and I was ready to take it on. There were so many people at the top to share the same feelings. Trails started in every direction and ranged from bumpy to soft and narrow. It was hard to pick one because every one led to a new adventure.

I picked the hardest one. I believed that if I could accomplish an extreme trail I would reach the highest levels of my fears. If I could do that, I would be able to conquer every trail on the mountain.

Down the mountain I went. It was a rush. The trees were speeding past me as if I was moving at a hundred miles per hour. I felt the snow crunching under my skis, cutting through like a knife slicing through cake. Also I heard the scraping and scratching of my skis trying to cut into the ice. Back and forth I went. My legs were burning as I was trying to keep my skis from spreading apart. The cool breeze became a freezing wind the faster I went. I hit a small hill on the mountain and soared in the air, flying like an eagle ready to dive in after its prey. I felt the rush of excitement all through my body. The end was almost near. I stopped to take a breath and the air was cold. It was hard to breathe. At that moment, I took a chance to look around. I felt alone, but it was so peaceful. All I could hear was the wind blowing through the snow covered pine trees, as if maybe they were trying to say something. The trail ranged from smooth to bumpy. Off the side of the trail you could see how the snow was built up from the snow-blowing machine.

The end was just over the hill. The trail was long and strenuous. I had skied one of the toughest trails on the mountain. My goal was accomplished, and finally I had reached the base of the mountain where it all had begun. I could see the people who had skied the mountain before me. Their facial expressions varied from fear to astonishment. I looked up with amazement and said, "I have done the impossible; now I can do all the trails of the mountain."

Attitash Bear Peak is by far the most wondrous mountain I have ever experienced. It is the most visited ski-mountain in New Hampshire. The feelings that ran through me that day are what will keep me skiing this mountain for years to come. There are twelve months ahead which will leave me with great anticipation for what lies ahead next year at Attitash Bear Peak.

Douglas Owens, a Graphic Design major, hopes to become a professional artist in the future. Before taking his writing course with Clare Thompson in the spring of 2000, Doug says writing "was like I was lost in a huge maze and I could not find my way out." However, now after taking the Basic Writing course, he says, "I found the exit for that maze." Along with drawing and writing, Doug also enjoys playing sports, watching movies and walking on the beach. Doug is twenty-five years old.

My Favorite Flower, My Mother

by Rena Ferullo

Life is a path of flowers all vividly distinctive, manifesting a beautiful scene in our life. In our journey of life we walk down this path and some of these flowers turn our eyes and minds, for they are beautiful where they are. Their presence on the road makes a big difference because it adds color and refined taste to our journey. These flowers symbolize different people in our lives, and some of them stand out, just like my mother does in my life.

My mother is a medium-build brunette of average height (about five-and-a-half feet), with nut-brown eyes and short hair. She has beautiful hands and long legs. Her skin is very soft and scattered with freckles that turn darker and increase in the sun. She talks a lot with her hands and her face. If she is telling a short story, you can block your ears and watch her hands and you will be able to understand the story. She walks holding her head up, ready to face whatever might occur. Whenever she goes out she wears one of her nice perfumes; nevertheless, I prefer her natural skin fragrance that I smell when I kiss her.

She got married when she was 13 ½ years old; therefore, she didn't get to pursue an education and be a career woman. Nonetheless, her marriage didn't keep her from being an eminent, highly respected woman in her society. Our neighbors and family come to her for advice or when they need someone to listen to their problems. She really makes a difference in everyone's life just by listening and saying, "Take it easy, my friend; life is not too bad—look at the bright side, and hope to have a better tomorrow. God never forgets the people who love him." Therefore, everything she does and says is from God. She is always trying harder to make the people around her happier by keeping a smile on her face and by treating everyone equally, no matter what color or kind they are.

In addition, she is very thoughtful and solicitous. She is willing to give everything she has to put a smile on someone's face. When we were in Lebanon, one of our neighbors couldn't provide food and clothing for her children. My mother used to prepare our meal, split it in half and send them the other half. On Christmas, she used to buy something for the children so that they had a gift to open. She didn't only put a smile on their faces, she engraved hope and good memories in their hearts. It is her own special way of making everyone feel that life is good.

For over 27 years, she has filled my father's life with joy and happiness. She is his sunshine in the morning that starts up his day and his moonlight that enlightens his night. During the day she offers a soft breeze that brings charm and comfort to his day. She wakes up with him every morning. The first thing she does is to give him a kiss and say, "Good morning. How did you sleep, sweetheart?" While he is getting ready to go to work, she prepares his coffee and pours it in his huge mug. Next she prepares his breakfast, "to go," for my father doesn't like to eat early in the morning. After that she places all his medication pills for the day in a tiny container and hands it to him. She does all this with a soft smile on her face, as if she were dreaming a nice dream. My father looks at her with a quick smile and talking eyes that I could read as trying to say, "What would I do without you?" Then, they kiss each other goodbye and wish each other a nice day. At lunch, my mother cooks a meal for my father and brother with some fruits, and takes it to my father's work. At night, she greets him with a big smile on her face like she hasn't seen him for days.

My mother raised five of us. She taught us to treat everyone with fairness and dignity. She always says, "Don't judge a book by its cover. Always give the person a chance to show who they are." She also

says, "Love and respect everyone, no matter who they are and what they do, for a person is not what he has, but who is he is!" She raised all five of us with equal love. Whatever she did for the oldest one, she did for the youngest one. She taught us to respect each other and never raise a hand to one another. Whenever we started a fight, she would come in the room and say, "People talk and animals fight!"

She devotes all of her time to us. She wakes up before anyone else in the house, and she goes to bed after everyone is asleep every night. She drives my oldest brother to and from school every day. Then she comes back home and cooks lunch for my father. In the afternoon, she takes my youngest brother to his basketball practice, leaving no time for herself.

She is also a great cook. Everything she makes is delicious. Whenever I come home from work, I can guess from the driveway what I am going to have for dinner. She always cooks with a smile on her face and she tells me all the time, "Cooking is an art." I can see that very clearly in the way she sets up the table and prepares the meals always with a special, very savory garnish, like parsley, lemon, tomatoes, and basil. Her artwork on each meal embellishes the table with a delicious taste.

My mother taught me a lot of things. Some lessons are engraved in my head and heart, like the one on life when she said, "Life is like a boat in a big ocean and we are the captain on this boat. The water is not always calm, it can be very choppy; therefore, it doesn't matter how strong the boat is. What matters is how good and experienced the captain is. If he is strong and experienced, he can handle the boat, cope with the waves, and return to the shore safely." What I comprehend from her example is that I am the leader in my life, and the abruptly shifting water is the ups and downs in my life. To confront them I have to be brave, courageous, and able to defy troubles without hesitation or fear. She often tells me, "Have faith in God and good things will happen to you!" She enlightens me by saying that. Now I know for sure that if I have faith in God and in myself I can surmount the difficulties and overcome the obstacles.

My mother is always willing to listen to me. No matter what she is doing, she stops and gives me all her attention, whether I had something good or bad to say. When I am feeling down, all I have to do is put my head on her shoulder, and with her magic hands she plays with my hair, pulling all my sorrow away with her charms and spells.

My mother never stopped teaching my sisters, brothers, and me about life and what to expect. I feel like she filled my basket with all kinds of fruits, so that on my journey of life, I pick a fruit when I am hungry and in need of it. Moreover, that's when I realize how tasteful and delicious these fruits are. All in all, I realize that she prepared me with everything I need and packed my basket with everything I will need throughout my journey, so that I won't be walking down the road hungry, scared, or lonely. She is so special in her own ways that no matter how much I try to be like her, I feel that I am far away. However, the more I try, the greater I feel—closer to perfect, and adored by the others around me. For all these reasons and many others, she is the best person I have ever met and I will always love her the most. She is the most beautiful flower on the inside and the outside. After all, words aren't enough to describe her, for she is the best gift God sent to everyone who knows her. I will admire my mother, the best mom, for the rest of my life.

"I always liked writing, but I never thought that I could write that much until I took this class," says ***Rena Ferullo****. But now that she has taken Basic Writing with Margaret Bergeron in the spring of 2000, Rena claims, "Writing has become a habit to me, something that I want to do daily." A Business Management major at NECC, Rena also works as a service support specialist. Outside of school and work, twenty-four-year-old Rena also enjoys listening to music, working in the garden, riding her bike and spending time with her family.*

My Friend
by Kerry Ann Landers

He wasn't a tall man. I guess he was kind of stocky, about my height. His hair was silver gray and he was balding on top. He would comb his hair over the top, with what we would refer to as "the grand sweep." He had a bad leg and walked with a limp. He almost dragged his leg when he walked. I imagined he was retired and he hurt his leg in the war. On hot days when he wore short sleeves, I saw a tattoo on his arm. I imagine a serviceman when I see tattoos, for my father-in-law got his tattoos in the Navy. His face had rolls of skin instead of wrinkles. When he smiled his whole face would light up. His teeth weren't clean, but his smile was sincere. He wore the same kind of baggy pants my father would wear, with a flannel shirt under his orange safety vest. He would risk his life every day stepping out into the traffic with his big red stop sign. He was there in all kinds of weather.

You didn't mess with him when he told you to do something. He had a rough manner about him, but he was really a sweetie. He yelled at the kids, "You!" shaking his finger at them, "Get off the grass and stay off!" He would scare the kids and me too.

The kids would come to me and say, "He yelled at us to stay off the grass."

I would shrug my shoulders and say, "Well then, stay off the grass." I would think to myself, "I am not going to tangle with him, especially when he is right."

When I started working at the day care center, the director told us how he was coarse in speaking to her about moving the van. She said to me, "He was almost scary." I asked her what she did and she said, "I moved the van like I was told." I explained to her that what he did was a thankless job. He evidently took his job very seriously. He kept the children safe when crossing the street.

As I was parking the van in front of the school, I started to realize how hard this friend of mine really worked. I remember the time he yelled at a parent for crossing before being told. The parent looked disgruntled. I went over to the parent and said, "It's pretty lousy that he is making sure that you and your children are safe."

She looked at me, smiled and said, "Yeah, you're right. Maybe I should thank him." Parents don't realize that the crossing guards are here to help and care for their children. That is why the crossing guard has rules and regulations and everyone should comply with his directions.

I would have to pick up my little buddy Patrick in the van at another school. I would come up from a side street to the Kelley School. My friend, the crossing guard, would come out and stop the traffic so I could cross to the other side in front of the school. I used to tell Patrick, "Watch this. He is going to stop traffic for me."

Patrick would roll his eyes at me and say, "He does that to everyone. He is just a nice guy."

"Maybe so, but not everyone smiles, waves out the window and yells 'Thank you!' like I do," I exclaimed. Patrick just shook his head and grinned at me.

He may have been polite to everyone, but I know I was special. On the last day of school I had made him a loaf of bread with my new bread-maker. You would have thought I had given him a million bucks. Later he told me how his wife enjoyed it and thanked me again. I knew then that I had made a good friend. We would make small talk about the weather, the news of the day, or what was going on around town. Patrick was right. He did treat everyone about the same. He would hobble over to the Mercedes

parked five inches over the crosswalk and tell the parent who was all dressed up in his business suit that he couldn't park there and point out how the end of his car was on the crosswalk. The well-dressed man would get back into his car with a sigh and drive off, looking for another parking space.

Last September when I went cruising by to see my friend and give him a big wave to welcome him back for the beginning of the school year, my landmark was missing. When I saw another fellow doing his shift, I thought to myself, "Maybe he is just enjoying the good weather." Later that week my curiosity got the better of me and I asked another crossing guard the whereabouts of my friend. She said he had died over the summer. I was saddened to think I didn't get a chance to say good-bye. I miss that unkempt man with the scruffy smile. He made me feel welcome every time I saw him. I had looked forward to seeing him come September. He became a little part of my world. He taught me that even us little guys count and make a difference in the world. It seems strange that I never knew his name, but I always considered him a friend of mine, maybe because he was a big part of my day.

As I picked up the kids at school and we rounded the corner heading for the van, I yelled at the kids, "Get off the grass and walk on the sidewalk!"

They looked at me as if to say, "Gee, what's bugging her?" I looked up toward the heavens and said to myself, "That is for you, my friend. You did make a difference," and smiled.

Kerry Landers is fifty years old and has been married for twenty-five years. She is the proud mother of two children, a son and a daughter. While her major is undecided, she currently works as a day care instructor. Before taking her Basic Writing course with Margaret Bergeron in the spring of 2000, Kerry was "scared" of writing. Now, she says, "I have a lot more confidence." Along with writing, Kerry enjoys riding her bike, reading, and going for walks.

Grandpa Janet
by Sherri Brandon

As I trotted across the yard on a tall steed, my hair bounced with each step until . . . BOOM! As my eyes slowly opened, looking up, the bright red hair and concerned look stared down at me until I was back up again, riding through the wind. The tall man caressing my leg, as if to say I was fine, walked along beside me. The ride on my neighbor's horse is only one of the many memories I have of my Grandpa Janet.

My Grandpa Janet, also known as Ralph Morgan, got his name from my brother Jerry. Jerry and I were the oldest of the grandchildren. It was hard to call out Grandpa or Grandma and get the right one. Both of my grandmothers were named Edna, so first names were out. Jerry came up with the idea; he named Grandma and Grandpa after Janet. Janet was my aunt and she lived with Grandma and Grandpa. My great grandparents then became Grandma and Grandpa Judy, as they had a dog named Judy. I must say it worked. No one ever mixed up who was who after that.

Grandpa Janet was one of my best friends growing up. I would spend hours with him in the garage making things for the house or fixing things like the toaster or the coffeepot. Even the time when Grandma got the fork stuck in the toaster, Grandpa just smiled to himself and said, "Tea for two and two for you..." nudging me to join in. If we weren't in the garage, we would be outside mowing the large yards that surrounded the house. Grandpa had a Wheel-Horse tractor that he would spend hours on. The front yard was four acres with a large circle driveway in the middle. The first backyard was two acres wide. Then the back forty, as Grandpa called it, was another eight acres. Grandma was in charge of the flower gardens that trimmed the driveway and the yards, but Grandpa prided himself on the lawns.

He was a slim man, almost six feet tall, with bright red wavy hair, glasses and the warmest smile. His eyes as blue as the sky could see right through you. He knew if you were the one who threw the snowball at his clean car or if it was someone else just by looking at you. As he got older, the red hair turned to snow white, but he would tell you, "I may have snow on the roof but fire in the furnace."

Grandpa is the father of five children, two boys, Donald and Bill, and three girls, my mother, Pat, Elaine and Janet. There are nineteen years between Mom and Janet. He also has nine grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Grandpa is a people person. To each he gave warmth and caring and in return their energy filled him. He would walk the block and visit his neighbors on a regular basis, knowing each by their first names and if there were a new member to the family, he would be the first to congratulate him. One of his many civic things was to pass out candy canes at Christmas with his best friend, Sergie. Sergie was a huge black and white huskie. Janet had gotten him from one of her boyfriends while she was at Indiana University. Janet gave him to Grandpa after Grandma died. The name Sergie came from one of her Russian college friends. You would never see Grandpa without Sergie from then on. They would dress up like Santa and visit all the nursing homes, the burn center and hospitals bringing cheer and smiles to everyone. Off season, they made the tour of all the downtown stores passing out Hershey's Kisses. The ladies at the blood bank always looked forward to seeing them. Grandpa also helped with Meals-on-Wheels and checked on the homebound with the church members.

For several years he was also the mayor of the little town in which he lived. Spring Grove, Indiana, is only about a mile wide and two miles long. At one time they did have gas stations and stores but now the

town is full of medical buildings and doctors' offices to be close to the hospital down the hill. Richmond, Indiana, surrounds the town itself.

As a child I remember him being a little tied, as in my grandmother had a close eye on him. I never knew why until later when my Uncle Bill told me the story. "Grandpa was a ladies' man," he said. One day Grandma dropped him off at work. Grandpa was a toolmaker in a small, locally-owned company. She then watched him walk in the front door, out the back door and into another car. It seems Grandpa had gotten a little too friendly with one of the ladies from church. Grandma put a stop to it then and there, and from then on, Grandma knew Grandpa's every move. Even sending him to the grocery store, she would make him a list with the item, brand, aisle and what it cost. She would even have it timed as to how long it should take him.

Several years later, after Grandma Janet died, it didn't take Grandpa long to become his old self again, the true flirt and ladies' man. You could find him out on dates each night, a church lady here, a new friend there, or perhaps an old schoolmate.

Grandpa soon married Margaret, a woman he had known since their school days. The family didn't much like her and some refused to join in on the wedding. My mother told her brothers and sisters, "If I'm going, by God, you all had better show! It is Grandpa who is going to be living with her and it was his choice." My brother was the only one who managed not to show for the big event. Grandpa did tell me a few years ago if he had waited only a couple more weeks he wouldn't have married Margaret. His eye was really on Mrs. Green, but she wasn't ready to remarry yet. Grandpa was free with Margaret to come and go as he pleased and flirting was a common event. Margaret died last year after a long illness. They were married for fourteen years.

A few years ago I ran an ice cream store on one very busy downtown street. He and I would stand in the front window and check out women. He would tap me and say, "Check her out," and I would tap him to see another woman coming up the street. He told me he had one problem, "My eyes are younger than my body!" Grandpa now lives in a nursing home in Richmond, Indiana. He will be 94 next May, but that hasn't slowed him much. Even in the nursing home he races about winking and flirting with all the other ladies in the home.

It is great to know Grandpa Janet on so many different levels. First as a child who saw the warmth and love, but from a distance—he was on a pedestal—to knowing him now, as a friend.

I think the one thing that my grandfather taught me is to live life to its fullest and to hear, see and enjoy nature. I can hear him say, "Today is never like yesterday, nor will it ever be that way tomorrow. Love and respect everyone. It's okay to disagree, but agree to disagree. You may not always like another, but it's their choice in this life. You have your choice. Make it your best."

*Thirty-nine-year-old **Sherri Brandon** was a student of Joanna Fortna's in the spring of 2000. Before beginning his writing class, Sherri says she was "challenged, scared even" of writing. Now that she's taken her writing course, she is "excited and wanting to do more." Aside from writing, Sherri also enjoys camping, gardening, music, ten-pin bowling, poetry and human nature. Sherri is working towards a Deaf Studies degree at NECC.*

Tricks of Halloween

by Mary Polanco

I waited for my sister, Rossy, who was five years old, to ring the doorbell for a third time before telling her to go to the next house. It was Halloween night, and I was watching out for my little sister while she trick-or-treated. It seemed so childish then, knocking on doors of strangers' houses asking for treats. But I remember when I was her age, how fun and spooky it was on Halloween night going door to door asking for candy and being scared by the older children. "Trick-or-treat, smell my feet, give me something good to eat," echoed in my ears and in my heart.

How different life was when I was Rossy's age. As my little sister and I walked to the next house, my mind took me back to when I was nine years old. I remembered that my friend Lissette and I had planned on going trick-or-treating. This would be the first time, for both of us, without our parents as chaperones. Lissette was going to meet me at my house as soon as the sun started to go down. "Are you ready to see ghosts and demons?" she asked. I laughed, trying to show how brave I was, but inside I was very nervous and even scared.

We had heard all the stories about witches eating little children, as told to us by our *abuelas* (grandmothers). "They'll catch you, cook you and eat you," *Abuela* used to say, with her eyes wide open looking straight at us and doing all the movements and sounds while telling the story.

I knew that there couldn't be real witches and monsters, but somewhere down deep inside of me I wasn't sure. "The only ghost I'm going to see is you when I get more candy," I said to Lissette.

We both laughed and ran down the stairs and outside. The night was quiet. Leaves were falling from the trees and the children were out with their costumes on, ready to go trick-or-treating. I thought I heard my mom say something and I yelled back, "We'll be home by ten o'clock, Mom!" and ran to catch up to Lissette. There was no way I was going to let her beat me in who had the most candy.

Lissette and I had just finished racing to the next house when we heard a scream. We looked at each other, and I knew we both were thinking the same thing: witches! All evening Lissette and I were trying to outdo each other. At each house, it was a challenge to see who was going to get the most candy. Now, all we were thinking about was how fast could we get home.

"Do you think it was a witch?" Lissette asked.

I couldn't answer. I was too scared. "Naw. There are no such things as witches," I said. But one look from Lissette told me that she didn't believe that statement and honestly, neither did I. Nervously, I said, "I have more candy than you. I win. We can go home now if you want." It was a nine-year-old's attempt at pretending not to be afraid. It wasn't working.

"Marlen. Marlen!" My name being screamed at me brought my mind back from the past. My sister had her goody bag full and was busy trying to stuff three Tootsie Rolls into her mouth.

"Hmrphrrsf unneh," she said. In Tootsie Roll talk that was "Want one?"

I laughed, "No *mi hermana*, you enjoy them."

As we walked down the street, a scream ripped through the night. "What was that?" asked Rossy.

I could tell by the way she asked and the nervous giggle in her smile that she was trying to cover up how scared she was. I stopped in front of our house and with a smile, said, "Let me tell you a story about when I was your age and went trick-or-treating on Halloween night."

My sister's face was serious and drawn as I described the scream. "Just like the one we heard?" she asked.

As I told her about my first trick-or-treating night with Lissette, I closed my eyes and remembered.

"'Naw, let's go see who's screaming,' I had said to Lissette.

'Huh, yeah sure. If you really want to,' Lissette had stuttered, as we began walking towards the forest behind the house we just left. We both were trying to be grown up and brave.

As I got closer to the first line of trees, I felt a hand grab my hand. 'Ouch, Lissette, you're going to break my fingers,' I said. It seemed like Lissette held tighter.

We got deeper into the woods, and we saw a fire burning. The intense smell of smoke led us to where the fire was. Lissette stopped and whispered, 'Marlen, maybe we should go back now. It's getting late.'

I was scared too, but also curious about the fire. I wanted to know if witches really did exist. What would happen if I saw one was a different story, but at that time I wasn't even thinking about it. 'Shhh,' I had said.

As we got closer to the fire, I could see an old woman with a ratty hat and an old blanket covering her shoulders, picking something out of a bag and putting it to her mouth. My mind was saying, 'Run! Run!' but my legs refused to move.

I had to know who or what this old lady was. I could hear Lissette sobbing, her hand squeezing mine harder and harder. But she kept walking closer and closer to me. Lissette and I were probably ten feet from the old lady when she raised her hand and screamed 'Whhaaaaaa!' Lissette screamed at the top of her lungs and took off running. I tried to run and run, but my foot got caught in a hole and I fell to the ground. I had screamed for Lissette to come back and help me, but she never stopped running."

"Well, what happened?" Rossy asked.

I laughed again. "That old witch that was screaming came closer and closer to me. I think I even wet my pants. Do you want me to tell you more?" I asked Rossy.

"Yeah, tell me! Tell me!" Rossy begged.

"You'll have to give me a candy bar if you want me to go on," I told Rossy. She quickly reached in her bag and handed me a handful of Tootsie Rolls and said, "*Por favor*, Marlen, don't stop."

"Well," I said, "there I was trying to get my foot out from the hole with this old lady coming closer and closer to me. 'Marlen!' the witch said. I couldn't believe what I had heard. How could this witch know my name? Was this another part of her spells? Was she going to eat me? 'MARLEN!' I began to cry, thinking about this old lady putting me in pot and cooking me. '*Mi hija*, stop your screaming. Don't you recognize your own *Abuela*?' I couldn't believe it. This witch could even talk like my grandmother.

'Please don't eat me, *Bruja*,' I begged.

The old lady laughed. 'Eat you, *mi amor*? I would never eat you. I can't even eat all of this chocolate that I got from trick-or-treating because of this damned bad tooth I've got.'

As the old lady reached down to pick me up, I realized it was my *Abuela*. My tears turned to laughs. '*Abuela*, what are you doing here and why are you screaming?' I asked.

'*Mi amor*,' she said, 'no matter how old you get, take time to enjoy the good things in life. I love chocolate, and the only way I can get some without your mother bothering me is on Halloween. It's just this damned tooth hurts so much that every time I take a bite, it hurts.' As I explained how Lissette and I had heard the screams and thought there were witches in the forest, my grandmother laughed even harder. 'Oh, you sweet little girls,' she chuckled. 'So that's why Lissette was screaming so loud and running so fast.' With the smile still on her face, my *Abuela* said, 'Marlen, let's go home and see if we can't eat some of this chocolate. I promise I'll try not to scream.' With a huge hug and a big kiss, *Abuela* and I went home."

"Wow," said Rossy. As we got up to go inside the house she asked, "Marlen, what happened to Lissette?"

With a serious face and tears in my eyes I said, "Shhhh, don't ever mention her name again."

"Why?" asked Rossy in a quiet and cautious way.

"Lissette was never seen again after that night. We looked for her and her parents looked for her for three days and never found a clue as to what happened to her. Some of the old *abuelas* say that it was a witch that got her and ate her for Halloween."

Rossy looked over her shoulder as we stepped through the doorway of our house. "Marlen, do witches really exist?"

I looked Rossy straight in the eyes and said, "I don't know. I still don't know." With that, Rossy went running to her room looking like a scared five-year-old, not too different than I looked that Halloween night a long time ago.

"Marlen, is that you?"

"Yeah, Mom, it's me," I answered.

"A young lady called for you. I think it was Lissette, that little friend of yours who moved to Florida. She left her number and asked that you give her a call."

"Thanks, Mom." I couldn't wait to call Lissette and ask her how her Halloween was. Mine was great!

Mary Polanco is a native of the Dominican Republic and is a Liberal Arts major. In the fall of 1999, she was a student in Joyce Dukes' Basic Writing course. Currently, Mary is a student in a Composition I course, where we are sure she is still entertaining her readers with tales of her childhood.

Gotcha, Young Boy
by Benito Mendoza

All my friends at high school smoked. I did not want to be the chicken of the group. I did not want to get behind so when I was 16 years old I started smoking. It was cool to have a cigarette in my mouth. I felt independent, free and much older. I thought that from then on I would decide and do whatever I wanted to. However, my first day of smoking I was caught by my mother.

Jorge was the most popular boy in our classroom and the best looking, according to the girls. He had blue eyes and very dark hair. Under his white long-sleeved shirt, one could imagine a very well developed upper body. He played rugby and this sport requires a strong upper body, as well as strong legs. He was the tallest among the students and the only boy who shaved. The rest of our faces lacked hairs and they looked like smooth bottles. After school we always walked together to our houses because we lived near each other. One day he bent his body over, took out a Marlboro box he hid inside his socks and offered me one.

My eyes were wide open. They wanted to run from my face. I looked at the Marlboro box, looked at him and looked back at the cigarette. I could not believe what I was seeing. He already had one in his mouth. He looked for a lighter in his backpack and soon I saw a spiral of smoke going up in the air like chimney smoke during winter.

"Hombre, help yourself to one. Would you?" Jorge said in a natural way. He thought I smoked. Most of the kids at school did.

"Oh...I...no...my mother and father will kill me," I replied, almost shaking. It scared the hell out of me.

Jorge shook his head vaguely and then added sadly, "We have been friends for many years. You have always trusted me. What is going on with you? Nobody will know. Don't be a chicken."

I looked to my left, to my right and to the back. I wanted to make sure no acquaintances were looking at me. "Fine. I will try," I said in a low voice.

The first test was putting the cigarette in my mouth. I placed it between my teeth and an excessive amount of saliva was pouring from my mouth. Jorge said laughing, "You look like a cow chewing sugar cane with that cigarette between those teeth. During smoking, style is very important." He continued, "Place it between your lips and apply delicate pressure between them. Smoking is an art. It is synchronized movement between hand, lips and respiration." He helped me to light the cigarette.

The smoke was growing fuller and fuller, like an inflated balloon in my mouth. I didn't know what to do. Jorge screamed, "Swallow! Swallow!" I took a large swallow and the smoke hit my throat. Then the smoke of the cigarette penetrated deeper inside my body and I felt my respiratory system stop functioning. Surely I would die without breath. Suddenly, I lost my balance and felt dizzy because not enough oxygen was coming to my brain. I started to cough.

"Do not open your mouth and inhale what you have in your mouth," Jorge said. The coughs were noisier and so persistent that I could not help myself. The cigarette jumped from my lips like white frogs to the puddle we have in our backyard.

The taste was disgusting but I did not want to admit that I could not do it. Jorge took the cigarette from the ground and said, "Do not throw it away. This stuff is very expensive." I thought Jorge was mad, but then he started laughing and gave me back the cigarette.

The next time I inhaled was easier. I tried to inhale less and more carefully. In a few minutes I finished smoking the first cigarette of my life. Jorge talked as an expert about smoking. "In order to master the art of smoking, it is necessary to practice," I remember him saying. He gave me another one that I finished faster than the first one and two more for my practice at home.

I got home and went directly to the bathroom. I needed to wash myself and to try to get rid of the ash smell. In reality I wanted to practice the art of smoking. I disposed of my school clothes and placed them at the bottom of the pile of dirty clothes we kept in the bathroom. I put on a big T-shirt and blue shorts. I lit a cigarette and inhaled a lung full of smoke. It was more than I could hold in my lungs. I coughed a few times and someone knocked on the bathroom door. I responded in a hurry, "I'll be ready in a minute." I did not finish the cigarette and threw it as far as I could through the bathroom window. At that moment I did not care if I set my neighbor's house on fire. I cared more about not being discovered. I was barefoot, so where could I place the other cigarette? I put it in the most unusual place, inside my underwear. I placed it between the elastic part of the shorts and my stomach.

It was time for supper. My mother asked me, "Could you please set the table as you always do, my little sunshine?"

"Sure I will," I responded in a whisper. I was afraid to open my mouth and let her smell the characteristic aroma of cigarette.

She exclaimed, "Do you feel okay, little bird?"

"I don't know what happened to my throat," I said, placing my right hand on my throat. Sure I knew what was going on. Too much practice to master the art of smoking was showing its first effect.

My mother asked me to reach for the sore throat medicine she kept on top of the kitchen cabinet. I brought a chair to climb on but my mother stopped me.

"Honey, just stretch both of your arms up and you will reach the medicine," my mother said impatiently. I slowly stretched my arms up and my T-shirt accompanied them. I was about to reach for the medicine when I saw my mother staring at my stomach.

At that moment I realized my mother had gotten me. I dropped the bottle of medicine. I wanted to move but I could not. My mother's face changed from red to pale white and she went motionless for an

instant. She started to mumble but no words came from her mouth. I was cold though it was summer time. I wanted to tell her to slap my face as many times as she liked, that I deserved it. Thoughts came to my mind. I could run away, or I could say how sorry I was and I could promise not to do it again. My mother came back to herself and said, "Go to your room. I will be with you in a minute."

I crossed the living room and went to my room. My mother came and said, "You are really making this very difficult. Don't you think it would be a lot easier if you told me what was up with you at school?"

I did not have an answer to her question. I was all red and could hardly talk.

"Talk before I lose my patience and this fist goes off," she grunted. She held up her fist and said again, "Five seconds, and I'm counting!"

I could very well do the same she was doing, but she was my mother and you don't put your hand on your mother. "My friend Jorge gave me those cigarettes," I said nervously.

"I think you'd better take a look at yourself and don't blame others for your acts," she said.

"I am sorry, Mami. It will never happen again. I should not do it."

"Don't promise too much, young boy. For a boy of sixteen what you did was not right," she responded, feeling this could happen again.

"Whatever punishment I will accept," I replied. I was guilty.

She started blinking her big black eyes and was wondering what to say. "For two months you won't be allowed to go to the movie theatre and I expect better grades from school."

"Hey, thanks. You're an angel," I added. My mother's hand softly reached for and lifted my hot chin.

Looking back at that experience, I can now laugh with my mother. I realize at the time I was young and wanted to experience some kind of rebellion and freedom. After that experience, I tried to be more honest with my mother. One thing I still do is smoke, but not in front of my mother.

*"She made me believe in my writing ability," **Benito Mendoza** says of his Basic Writing Instructor, Faith Benedetti. Before taking Faith's class in the fall of 1999, Benito remembers writing as "the most difficult class in high school." Currently a Liberal Arts major, Benito hopes for a future career in nursing. Along with writing, he enjoys reading, playing sports, and spending a lot of time with people. "I learn a lot from them," he says. Benito is thirty-three years old.*

Racial Nightmare on the Road

By Jean-Max Geffrard*

They say that America is a free country, but is it really? What is the definition of a free country? What kinds of people and races are permitted to actually be free in this country? Are we allowed to go anywhere in this country and wherever we please at any time during any particular day? Please ask yourself and try to answer these questions for your country, because I don't think a free country implies that we are really free.

On Monday, the 21st of February around 12:15 a.m., as I was driving to see my friend in Portland, Maine, my radar detector went off beeping. I depressed the brake pedal to disengage my cruise control set at 70 mph. I looked at the speedometer needle that was de-accelerating to 65 mph and proceeded to my destination. There was neither a vehicle behind me nor a marked vehicle ahead. As I drove over the hill and down, in front of me another vehicle appeared, so I navigated my vehicle to proceed behind it. The unmarked vehicle pulled over to the left and quickly stopped at the separation of the guardrail on the highway without its signal on. At first I thought it was an ordinary driver who had missed his or her exit, and who was engaging in an unlawful turn at the separation of the guardrail. After I passed and almost hit the vehicle, on came its blue lights. I had to maneuver my vehicle to the right to avoid a collision.

I was stopped by an unmarked car driven by a state official. He was in his late twenties with a military hairstyle. He was handsome and friendly but not intimidating. His height was between 5'8'' and 5'10''. I did not pay too much attention to his body structure after that. I pulled over, turned off my engine, and waited for the officer to proceed with his claim. He got out of his vehicle and walked toward my car for his procedure. He had a flashlight pointing at my face and said, "License and registration, please."

I asked the officer, "Why am I being pulled over?"

He replied, "I cannot give you that information until you give me your license and registration."

I went to my glove compartment, extracted my registration and handed it to the officer. At that point he answered my question. "I clocked you at 78 mph," he said.

I knew his statement was incorrect because my cruise control was set at 70 mph when my radar went on. The officer went to his vehicle to run a check on my license and came back later with his report. I was issued a ticket for speeding and another for not wearing my seat belt.

He said, "You should know better to wear your seatbelt after you were pulled over before in the state of Maine."

I did not reply.

He asked, "How come you don't have your seatbelt on?"

I replied, "I was in an automobile accident before. I was trapped, my seatbelt would not disengage, and I didn't like the feeling of being restrained." I said to the officer, "Isn't this freedom of expression? Doesn't a person reserve the right not to wear a seatbelt if he or she is over 18 years of age?"

He replied, "Not in the state of Maine. It's mandatory to wear your seatbelt and it saves lives." We were having a great conversation, which may have turned into a debate until he changed the subject. "Can I have a look at your car?" he asked.

I did not know why. But I was a black man on a dark highway with a state official who concealed a badge and a gun. I was not going to argue or provoke the officer because I was not in my home state, and

my friends and family didn't know where I was. I had been in so many racial situations before in my life and it was time for me to put an end to it.

I had been in a situation where local officers threatened to arrest me because I did not look like I belonged in the neighborhood I live in, which is all white people. They threatened to arrest me for trespassing at my own parents' house. I was 16 years old, in high school, and did not know my rights. I'd had so many guns and shotguns aimed at my head and down my throat before. All those situations I had been in had developed the most respect for these officers—not for who they are, but for what they are capable of doing to anyone. An artist said, "If they are here to protect us, then who protects us from them?" Well, I wish I knew the answer to that question. Anyone could understand why I did not say no to the officer up in Maine when I was asked if he could take a look in my car. If I said no, he would have found a way to detain me and have my car towed to a remote location where it could be searched unlawfully without my permission. I did not want to be found dead in the state of Maine. There are so many things to consider when dealing with a state or a local officer. I did not have anything to hide, so I gave him permission to take a look in my automobile as he had asked. He never said anything about searching.

He went in my automobile and searched the entire contents. On my passenger side seat I had a plastic bag that I had taken from the trunk of my automobile. It contained a can of mace and an electric shocker for protection on the road and at home. He went through the plastic bag and asked, "What are these for?"

I answered his question. "These are for protection. In Massachusetts, one can never tell what will happen."

Later on, there was a second staff official on the scene. He asked to talk to me and I accepted. While he was talking to me, a third state official arrived on the scene with a dog and searched my automobile for drugs and guns. I was afraid they might plant drugs and guns in my car. They could not find anything in my car to attach to my record. The second officer that came to the scene asked, "Is there any object on you?"

I answered, "Yes, I have a knife I use at work in my coat pocket."

He proceeded to ask me many questions as if I were being interrogated. Maybe he thought I was not telling the truth or wanted me to change my story and break down into secret tears. I was not going to give him the satisfaction. They searched and searched but could not find anything else. At that point he asked, "Can you please place your hands behind your head?"

"Why?" I asked.

He replied, "We are charging you for this knife."

I said, "For this knife? A knife I use at work?"

"Yes," he replied. "You are being charged with possession of a concealed weapon." He stated that I needed a license to carry a gun or a knife.

I could not believe that they were charging me with the possession of a knife—a knife I use at work to cut cardboard and nylon straps. Most men in the state of Maine carried knives on them. Why was I any different?

I placed my hands behind my head, and was handcuffed and placed under arrest. He proceeded to charge me with the possession of a concealed weapon. It was a four-inch knife, he stated. It was an outrage, this entire situation.

I was taken to jail by the first officer who had pulled me over, without having my rights read to me and my automobile towed. The officer told me that I would be able to bail myself out that day. He told me that my bail would not be any more than $180. I guess he was wrong, because my bail was $290. In jail, I asked the guards why the bail was so high. They said it was because I was from out of state. They took my picture and fingerprinted me. It was the most embarrassing day of my life.

The jail was very nice and clean, but I did not want to be there. I could smell the unpleasant odor of alcohol on inmates' clothes. I listened to the words of an emotional female who cried all night, and who had so much to say with anger to the officers inside the jail. I saw cuts and bruises on the body of a young man in his twenties, who claimed that he got beaten up by a couple of guys at a nightclub and was arrested. I was very angry to be in jail. I was falsely arrested and could not wait to get a lawyer. I got very depressed and I started to build up anger toward the officer who arrested me. I spent most of the night making phone calls. I could not get in touch with any one of my friends or my brother. I wanted to die because I did not want to be behind bars like an animal. I called my ex-girlfriend and told her to keep on calling my house until she got hold of my brother. I could not use my calling card to make any phone calls to friends who did not accept collect calls. I was furious.

They made me take my clothes off, get into the shower, and wear a jail uniform after. My life and my well being were threatened because I refused to take a TB shot. They threatened to transfer me to another location, where they said I would not want to be, if I refused to take their routine TB shot. I had to sign a medical paper to waive my right and to give them permission to proceed with their routine. I did not want to be expedited and I had no choice. My right was violated and they inflicted me with mental anguish.

My brother, sister, and friend came to bail me out and could not. It seemed that my bail was raised to $540 without any clue whatsoever. My friend had the money so she bailed me out. As I was signing my release form I noticed the name of my ex-fiancée and her parents on my paperwork. I was angry to see their names, but what could I do? After all, I was so happy to be free again.

I had never known what racism was until I came to this country. It brought tears to my eyes and sadness to my life. Racism is a problem that I do not wish to deal with ever again. I think the people of this country should do something about it and I'll be the first one to start. I don't want to see my two daughters living and growing up in such a negative environment. They do not deserve to see such negativity around them, and no human being deserves to see it either.

This is the new millenium. Why doesn't this country wake up?

** Due to the extreme length of Mr. Geffrard's piece, what appears here is an abridged version of the original.*

*After taking a Basic Writing course with Brian Kuhl during the spring of 2000, **Jean-Max Geffrard** says he loves writing now. "I developed an addiction to writing," he says. Jean-Max is an Electronic Technology major at NECC and hopes for a future career in computer programming. He is also a single father of two young children, whom he loves very much. Outside of school, fatherhood and his work as a warehouse operation clerk, Jean-Max enjoys installing automotive stereo systems. He is twenty-nine years old.*

The Night of Change
by Dawn Smith

It was a beautiful July day in the summer of 1991. I was seventeen and my life revolved around the never-ending parties at my friend Paul's house. As usual, some of the other enduring spirits and I were all sitting around the kitchen table playing 45's, our favorite card game, drinking beer and talking about who would catch the biggest catfish that night. Paul's roommate Burner had just arrived home from work. He threw his muddy sneakers in the wash and joined the game.

Looking around the table, I got a warm feeling in my heart. This tribe was like my family. There were a lot of people that came and went, but we were the regulars. It was like our home away from home. I remember one of the many times I did the dishes, I cut my finger on a broken coffee mug. The scar that remains will forever memorialize in my mind the days I spent there.

On this day our 45's game seemed to last forever. Before we knew it, the sun had started to set. So we grabbed our fishing gear and had just started off towards the lake when Paul said, "Burner, aren't you going to put your sneakers in the dryer?" Burner ran back in while we all waited very impatiently, for there is nothing like the anticipation of catching the big one: that tight feeling of excitement deep in your stomach or the daydreams where you can see yourself leaning back against the weight of the monster on the other end of your line. Burner came back out of the house and we were finally on our way.

The lake is just a short walk down the old railroad beds. I had always liked that walk; when the trees are heavy with foliage they droop over the path blocking out the light and giving the sensation of walking through a tunnel. When we emerged from the other side it was already getting dark and the air had started to cool. It was going to be a perfect night. With a case of beer, good friends, and my fishing rod I was in heaven.

When we arrived at the lake we set up on the dock, got our lines out and started the waiting process, which on this night didn't take very long. Within an hour we had all caught something, though not the monster fish we had hoped for. Still, we were satisfied. With our bellies full of beer and our souls warmed from the company of good friends we packed up and said our good-byes to the lake till another night.

As we neared the entrance of the tunnel path I can remember thinking, as I had many times before, that I wished this night would never end—not knowing that what would soon take place would end it forever.

As we neared Paul's house, Burner said, "Does anyone else smell smoke?" We all answered yes. Then it started to get thick, burning my throat and stinging my eyes.

Then Paul said, "It looks like the woods are on fire." When I looked up my heart sank into my stomach and in an instant we all realized our worst fear.

Burner yelled, "Paul, your house is on fire!" We all began to run. By the time we got there, Paul's house—our house—was completely engulfed in flames. The firemen had already smashed out the windows and were spraying the water, but it was too late. Stupefied, I sat down on a rock across the street. A thousand thoughts and memories ran through my head. My feet would never stick to those dirty floors again . . . the ugly plaid couch where I had spent many nights passed out with Paul on the floor next to me, protecting me . . . the bathroom, with the broken mirror and missing tiles, that never had any toilet paper. The togetherness that I felt in this house I knew in my heart I would never feel again.

I was overcome with extreme sadness and anger as I watched what I felt was the center of my universe burn beyond recognition in front of my eyes. Paul sat down next to me and simply said, "It's over."

I cried that night, not for Paul's loss but for my own, because I knew that what Paul had said was true. It was over and only a matter of time before we would all go on with our lives in different directions.

It was later determined that Burner's sneakers in the dryer had started the fire.

Dawn Smith, a twenty-five-year-old mother to Harley Marie, age six, is currently a General Studies major at NECC. She was a student of Mary O'Neil's during the fall of 1999. After taking her writing class, Dawn says she is more "comfortable" with writing. Along with writing, she enjoys reading, playing bingo, and spending time with her family and life-mate, Steve. At present, Dawn works as a realtor.

Road Scholar
by James Breadmore

My favorite job ever was as a long-distance truck driver. In my youth, I was raised in the family moving business. My father trained me in all facets of its operation. When I was of age and out of school I purchased a truck and started moving people cross-country with Bekins Van Lines. I did this for roughly 10 years and almost one million miles. It was probably the most interesting 10 years of my life.

My duties on this job were to relocate people from their old homes to their new homes. These were usually interstate moves. Above being a truck driver, I also had to be a trusted friend. These people were entrusting me with almost every possession they had in the world. Can you imagine giving everything you own to a perfect stranger? It must overload a person with feelings of trepidation.

For the most part, mine was not a complicated job. I would show up at a person's premises early in the morning, bringing cups of coffee with me from the nearest coffee shop. I found that the best way to greet someone early in the morning was to greet them with a piping hot cup of coffee. This always helped, due to the fact that nine times out of ten, the coffee maker was packed in some lost carton.

After getting everyone wired on caffeine, I'd start my physical inventory of the goods I was moving. The inventory was a list of all items being loaded in my truck and their condition at origin. The rest of my duties were to safely pack the items in the truck for transportation. At destination the scenario was reversed. This time, we checked everything against the inventory for loss or damage.

One of the things I loved about this job was meeting people. It's amazing what one can learn from and about people just by being around them for a few days. During the course of this employment I met doctors, lawyers, politicians, and people from many walks of life. While moving a doctor, you may find out he's moving to a new city to work on some new wonder drug. A businessman may give stock advice. You may find out how to improve your golf score from one of them. Anything is possible when you strike up a conversation with someone new. I learned so much from so many of my customers.

Once, I was moving an attorney to Washington, D.C., during the summer of 1984. He was going to work at a lobbying firm there. He and I got along well during the move. During our discourse, I had asked, "Why do they call you a *lobbyist*?"

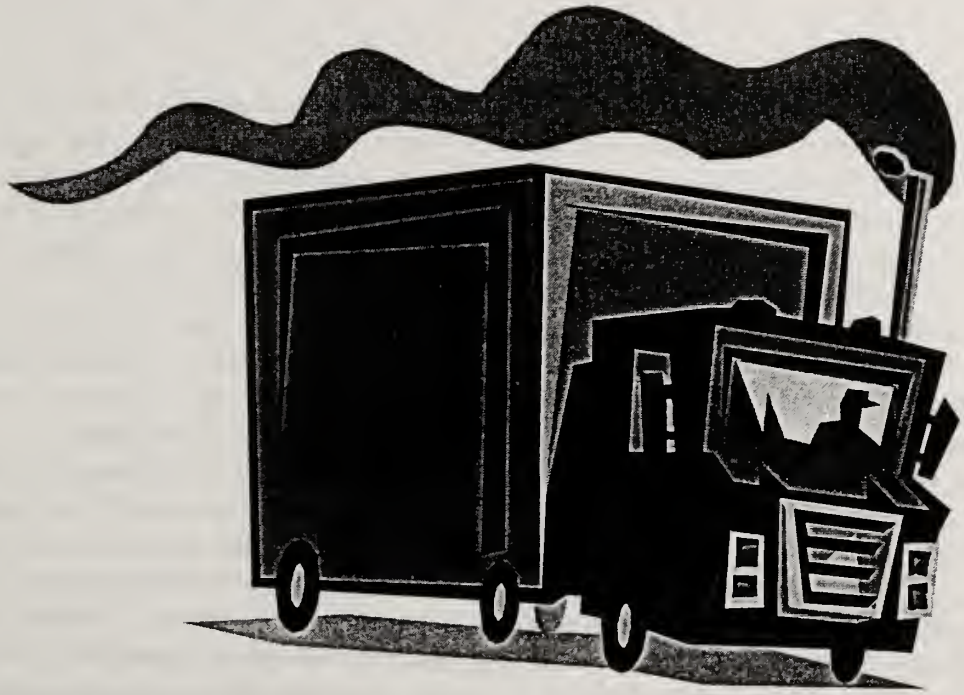
He smiled smugly. "Well," he said, "After the Civil War people who wanted favors from the politicians in Washington would hang around the *lobby* cloakroom and pass bags of money to their favorite politician." This act is known as *quid pro quo*. This old Latin phrase roughly translates into, "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours."

"So be careful where you hang out. It might become a lexicon you may or may not be proud of," he said.

I could never have guessed the origin of that word.

Through many of my customers and their families, I learned so very much: politics, history, science, and, yes, the value of family. It got so that I made it a point to learn as much as possible from everyone I came in contact with. I realized this was the opportunity of a lifetime. I was travelling all over the country, meeting all sorts of people whom I'd never meet again.

Unlike the drivers who haul freight and only get to meet dockworkers, I was in contact with different people and families almost daily. This gave me a unique insight into the way people lived and



raised their children. It got so I could learn all about a family, and never sound as if I were prying while asking questions. Cultures differed greatly in America, predicated on their geographical location. In the big cities I saw the hustle and bustle of urban life. In this fast-paced, non-stop society, rarely do people have time to stop and relax. The urbanites, however, seemed to thrive on this chaotic rat race. The streets of the cities are always full of stressed-out motorists trying to get nowhere fast. Although I've been to large cities like New York and Chicago, I've never understood why people choose to live there.

Rural living is so different than urban life. You can drive down a rural road of West Virginia and see people sitting on their porches reading or just watching cars go by. Nobody there seems to be in a rush. There is commerce in these areas, but people seem to take it much slower. They cast less of a sense of urgency about work than their urban counterparts.

I had been assigned to a move in New York City. I went to the agent who booked the move, where I received my paperwork and instructions. The paperwork said I was one of three trucks assigned to the relocation of Mr. J. Taylor of Eighth Avenue, New York, NY. I collected my paperwork and manpower and started for the residence of Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor lived in a large penthouse on Eighth Avenue. When I arrived, there were already two other trucks there engaged in the loading process. I exited my truck, and one of the other drivers ran over to me and said, "Do you know who we're moving?"

"Not personally," I replied, with sarcastic humor in my voice.

"This guy is James Taylor, the singer. You know—Carly Simon's husband," he said.

I asked if he was sure, and he answered, "Yes" with a wide-eyed, beaming smile.

I met Mr. Taylor, or James, as he asked us to address him, when I went up to survey the objects I was taking in my truck. I never had a chance to really converse with him until we arrived at the destination and the unloading was complete.

Mr. Taylor's destination was Martha's Vineyard, off the coast of Massachusetts. This was the first time I had ever driven a truck onto a ferry. The cost of the ride for a tractor-trailer was, as I recall, about $200. The other bad thing about this destination was that we were going to be unloading in 90°-plus heat for the next seven hours.

Being a curious person, I'd always try to learn something from, or about, my customers. Like I said, I always felt I was fortunate in being able to interact with people from all walks of life. Mr. Taylor was very affable and cordial to all of us. He and I started talking about his grandfather clock, which dated from 1780. I have a great love of antiques and this was a good icebreaker. We had a conversation on all types of subjects from music to children. After the moving-in process was complete, he invited us to hang out and barbecue with him and his friends. This was more than hoisting a few brews after a day's work. We swam in his pool, ate his food, and listened to tapes of his favorite performer, Jimmy Buffett. This was one hell of a day. As we said our goodbyes, he handed each of us a $100 tip. This man wined us and dined us and still felt we deserved more. I'd received tips of $100 or more before, but this man opened his home to us as well. I did not agree with some of his philosophies, but he was an interesting man to talk with.

During my 10 years on the road I went to 48 states, Canada, and Mexico. At this point in my life, I was having a ball. I've seen the Redwoods, the Grand Canyon, and most of the natural and manmade wonders of this continent. Best of all, I was getting paid for this traveling education.

My love of learning came from these experiences. By the time my road career was over, I could identify architectural styles, from Greek and Georgian to Provincial and Palladian. I learned of law, politics, and the history of our country. I have been in museums from Boston's MFA to California's Getty Museum. Never once did I allow a learning opportunity to pass. I permitted that occurrence once in my life, and vowed never to let it happen again.

In 1974, the federal court ordered that all public schools in Boston be desegregated. My mother was a dyed-in-the-wool bigot and declared, "My kids will never go to school with no n------," so in the fall of '74 she pulled me from school. After this experience, other than some trade schools and certificate courses, I never returned to formal school until entering college. I trained myself for the GED and passed it on my first attempt.

If there were any regrets of those years I spent traveling, it would be that at the time, books on tapes were rare. I now think that in the amount of hours I spent driving, I could have listened to most of the volumes from a public library. But instead I listened to Boy George's "Karma Chameleon" and to Michael Jackson "beating it" as the asphalt passed beneath my wheels. I did, however, manage to read a lot. I would buy a lot of books and customers also gave me a lot of books they no longer wanted.

I would recommend this job to any young person, just for the experience. The amount of knowledge one can absorb at no cost is immeasurable. Just one year of this job can take you from adolescence to maturity, and leave you with great self-esteem.

When setting out on this life, I never realized what was out there, or where it would take me. I am, however, very glad I had the good sense the good Lord gave me to take advantage of it.

James Breadmore, 37, lists as his occupation Renaissance Man–most accurately, we might add. A student of Faith Benedetti in fall 1999, James's love for and vast knowledge of American history, politics, and law are evident in both his writing and his conversation. A paralegal major who aims for a career as a lawyer, James served as a peer tutor to a sizeable group of students in a government course. He was "undecided" in his feelings toward writing before beginning the course but says that he is now "loving it!" Originally from South Boston, James currently resides in Lawrence.

Hogan Regional: A Life Experience

by Marcie Comeau

I was in my second year of confirmation class, and I had just turned 13 and had to do community service. The pastor of the church asked me if I had found a community service job yet. Father had been asked by one of the directors at Hogan Regional if he had any candidates who would be willing to work weekends. This is how I came to work at Hogan.

I had not asked very many questions about the job. Father told us (there were three of us from the parish) that we would work from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and a bus would be provided since most of the workers did not drive. On the first Saturday I got up at 5:15 a.m., as I had to be at the bus stop by 6:00. I was very nervous as I did not know what to expect, and I was the youngest person on the bus. We arrived at Hogan Regional at 6:45 a.m. and were met by a director with a clipboard that had our assignments.

Hogan Regional is a hospital for the mentally and physically ill. I thought that being only 13, I would probably work in the kitchen or library, or something along those lines. When I was told I would be working in the children's ward I was surprised—one, that a hospital like this had a children's ward, and two, that they would put a child to work in this ward. I had no idea what I was in for. We were brought to the ward and met by a nurse. She explained how the ward worked and what we would be doing. We were then brought into the nursery where the children were.

I was frightened by what I saw: kids kind of everywhere, some on mats, others in wheelchairs. I was in a daze as I did not see this girl, Alice, lying on the floor. She was moaning and reaching out, as if to grab. The nurse told us she was blind, but could see shadows. We had to be careful, as she would try to grab us, not to hurt us, but to see us through touch, and sometimes she would scratch and pull hair. I was Alice's first victim. She reached out to grab and got my arm, and I had a scratch about an inch long.

The nurse introduced us to the other nurses, and we each buddied up with one, who introduced us to the children we would be taking care of.

The nurse I was buddied with was very nice. She explained that in the morning we would either have to feed the children or bathe them and sometimes both, depending on how the shift before was (the overnight shift). We dug right in and started working. We had four children to get bathed, dressed, and fed, not necessarily in that order.

We had four children: Alice, Billy, Joel, and Billy's little sister, Suzy. The children had all different degrees of disability. Billy was in a wagon lined with fleece and pillows. He was in a body cast and would prove to be a challenge to care for. Billy was a bright little boy who loved to laugh, and I swear he did things just to get attention. Joel was born with Down syndrome. He was in a wheelchair and wore a helmet to protect his head. Joel had had surgery to reduce the fluid on his brain and help shrink his head to normal size. The operation was an experiment and he was doing very well for a little boy.

Alice was a child who, we found out later, was born with a sight deficiency. She was one of five children, I think, and her parents were older. Alice was a sad case, as she was neglected by her family—not on purpose, though. I think they did not understand the system, as they were immigrants and did not speak very good English. Alice could not walk or talk. She could hear, though, and seemed capable of learning

things. She could hardly even sit up on her own. Billy's little sister was six. She was so cute, with brown wavy hair and big dark eyes. Suzy was very protective of her brother. Whenever we were doing anything to him she would be right there watching. She spoke hardly at all, but you just knew that if you did anything to him or if she thought you were hurting him she would just scream and cry, pitching a fit.

Because I worked on Sundays, I could not attend my CCD class, so I had to meet one-on-one with Father Alves on Tuesday afternoons. Father would ask me questions about the job and how things were going. I told him a story about Billy and how I had to change his diaper. I explained that Billy was in a body cast and was 10 years old; changing a baby's diaper is gross, but a 10-year-old's is even grosser. Well, Billy had been especially gross that day and it had taken two of us to change him. We had to hold his hands away, as he wanted to play, and I do not know which one of us grabbed the baby powder and started to shake it all over him to mask the smell. Suzy got very upset, as Billy hated to have his hands held and he cried. Suzy cried and screamed. This had other kids crying. As I told this story to Father I realized I was crying. Father asked if I was crying because I had made a mistake in upsetting the children. Although I felt bad about scaring the kids, I was crying because of the situation these kids were in and the circumstances that brought them to this hospital.

One Sunday, the infirmary was short-staffed and I was asked to help out. I asked what I would be doing and was told I would only have to work up there till after lunch. I was so surprised to see the infirmary. There were babies in cribs and adults that were like small children. My patient was a baby, or at least looked like a baby. He was no baby, but a young adult born with a birth defect that kept him from growing, both outside and in. He ate baby food and looked like a baby. He was so cute.

This job was nothing like I had expected it to be. I had never expected to take care of children in a hospital for the mentally ill. I was told I would work Saturday and Sunday, eight hours each day. I would get paid $1.35 an hour till I had 20 hours of service towards confirmation. I never expected this job to touch my heart my heart the way it did.

At 13, I did not know of child abuse, and to see firsthand the damage child abuse can cause took away my own innocence. Billy and his sister Suzy were both abused. I had worked at the hospital for a few weeks before we got the lowdown on the patients, but as the nurses watched us work with the kids and we showed up every week, they started to trust us and tell us about the kids. Like Joel, whose parents came twice a month to see him and how it broke his mother's heart every time she had to leave her baby at this place. He had become a ward of the state so he could have his operation. As it was experimental, insurance would not cover it and the only way he could get the care he needed was for his parents to make him a ward.

Suzy and Billy had been found in their home badly abused and neglected. Suzy was found in a dark closet in soiled clothing. She was six months old and suffering from malnutrition. Billy had been physically abused, having been thrown against a wall. I think this is how his back got broken. Alice was just neglected, being born with a birth defect. Alice's parents did visit, but during the week, so we never saw them.

I often wonder what happened to these children. I know that some of the children were released to a halfway house in Gloucester, as I did see them when I was in high school, walking around town. These were children who had Down syndrome and were highly functional. I wonder what happened to Billy, Suzy, and Alice, as the hospital closed a number of years ago. I know that Joel went home with his parents. When I was still in school, Kelly, who had taken Joel home with her on weekends when it was permitted, told me he was walking and looked just like any other little boy—still small for his age, but doing great.

Looking back at this experience, I cannot believe they let a girl of 13 have that much responsibility. I learned so much about myself and how to work with others. I also learned to have more tolerance for others. We all have some kind of shortcoming but we should never make fun of someone else's. Now some 20 years later and a mother of three, I hope I have taught my children to be tolerant of others. I always correct them when they say something about another person. I let them know that we are all different and they should thank God that they are healthy. I always think about the challenges that the children I took care of faced every day for the two years that I knew them and I hope they have grown to overcome them. Whenever I encounter a homeless person I pray they were not a patient at the hospital, let out because of government cutbacks, and I always give them spare change and any cans and bottles I might have. Once, when my oldest child was a baby, we had friends visiting and we took them to Faneuil Hall. There were about 10 of us and it was a very hot June day. Everyone had a soda and put the cans on the stroller top. Well, this poor man who was walking by asked for the cans and I dumped out everyone's soda and gave him the cans. My friends got mad and teased me about being a softy.

The best stories I can tell about my experience are Billy walking and Suzy talking and trusting people more. Alice was learning to talk and to trust people, and she could even say my name and give me a hug. She stopped grabbing for things. But the very best was when I was in high school, I was walking downtown and heard my name being called. A girl was running up to me. She remembered me from Hogan. She gave me a big hug and wanted to know what I had been up to. The idea that I had made a difference in this young girl's life never hit me until the day we were at Faneuil Hall and the man asked for the cans. I hope that act of kindness made a difference in his life.

Thirty-eight-year-old ***Marcie Comeau****, mother of Tiffany 16, Chadd 10, and Trevor 7, was a student of Margaret Bergeron in the spring of 2000. Before taking her writing course, Marcie says she "never thought much about writing. I thought this class would be very difficult." Now that she has taken BasicWriting, she says, "This class has taught me to use my creative side and to trust my instincts. I really enjoyed taking the Basic Writing class." A Business Management major, Marcie also enjoys roller skating and sewing.*

This Joy
by Nicholas G. Kafkas

My favorite hobby as a teenager was to listen to music. I always had a CD player with some CDs in my school bag. I had (and still have) a great collection of CDs, records, and tapes. I still listen to all kinds of music, but I mostly like to listen to dance music, such as techno, euro house, disco, metal rock and classic rock.

It was a Christmas evening, and my friends and I were dancing and drinking in a club and having fun all night. We went to the Motion Club, which was located at the Kourouta Beach in Greece, because my friend Charlie was the Disc Jockey of the club. We were there all night, and we didn't spend anything, as the DJ's guests.

It was some time after midnight when Charlie came to me and told that he needed me. A few minutes later I was in the booth with him. "Here you go. Prove how good you are," Charlie told me, passing me the headphones. I stared at him for two seconds, since I noticed he was offering me two turntables and a sound mixer while some hundreds of people partied on the dance floor.

"I know how much you want to do this. Here, put these on and start mixing," he told me again. I took the headphones and put them on. I was up there, above the heads of almost a thousand people dancing, and of course, I was stressed. I finally had the opportunity to do what I always wanted to. I had to put on the kind of music that would keep the people dancing on the dance floor. I had the limited time of three minutes to select the proper song before I played it, and this was my biggest fear. However, I had to play the proper kind of music, the kind that the crowd wanted to listen and dance to.

I looked through the records and I found some songs that I liked. I turned all the lights off, except for the red laser beam, which moves around the space according to the music's beat. And I started playing some classic dance hits form the early '90s such as "The Power" from Snap and "The Last Train to Transcentral" from The KLF. The crowd went crazy. They had not listened to these songs for years, and they really wanted to dance to them again. The changes from one song to another were very good and strange or sometimes smooth. In less than one hour I played classic European dance hits, rock and roll, techno, and Greek hits. I played music for almost one hour and nobody noticed that the DJ was not the famous Charlie, but me; I had succeeded.

I was good, very good. The club's owner liked the music I played, and wanted to see me. Two months later I ended up as the DJ of the club. Charlie went away to study in Italy; and I, in the seventeenth year of my life, was there to replace him. During the first weeks I felt excited. I started to get popular and everybody wanted to buy me drinks. I bought some more records and CDs to extend my collection; I was visiting the CD stores once a week so I could update my collection.

"Music is eighty percent of a club's business," the boss told me. He was right. If you don't like the music at a place, you are going to leave. I had to play the music that people would like. My schedule was 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. Wednesday through Sunday. It was a hard schedule, but very good money; actually, it wasn't the money I cared about. From the first moment, I knew I was doing the job for this "joy."

I really liked this job. I remember sometimes the great or the funny moments that I had. One night there was a very rich businessman (indicated by his clothes and jewelry) and he had come to our club for a couple of drinks. It was a Wednesday night and it was not very busy, so I was listening to some new records

that I had bought and was testing them on the turntables. I played a song named "Money" by Snap. That man, when he heard that song, started laughing out loud. He came up to me and asked me if I could play that song again. I said yes, and so I did. Ten minutes later the man came up to me again and told me, "Play it again," while he was passing me a little pack of money.

"I cannot play the same song for a third time in a row," I replied to him.

"Why not? I will pay you to play this song again and again," the man told me.

"Sir, there are more people who want to listen to music. It's not just you in the club. I have to satisfy everybody," I said.

"I will buy a drink for everybody in here. I don't care about money. Just play that song," the guy told me again. So for the next twelve minutes I played the same song, and the man bought a drink for everyone in the club. I announced this incident to the people in the club and let them know that they could come to the bar for a free drink. I believe that this man was totally drunk or something had gone well with his business and he was happy that night.

"Joy" is the only word that can represent your feelings when you are a good DJ. I had to make the customers order more drinks, move them on the dance floor, and keep them dancing for as long as I could. These were the basic instructions from the management of the club. And this was what I did. Their joy was my joy too. I remember a Saturday night. The club was packed. It was the first night it was opened after some major renovations. I was there spinning the records from 9 p.m., and by midnight, there were more than two thousand people in there. The hours were passing and I was on the booth over the sound mixer. I have to admit, I would not feel tired as long as I could see the people on the dance floor.

When you have approximately two thousand people dancing and sweating under your music's beat, you have to thank them and give them what they want. Joy is what I was offering them. They were dancing and partying like animals with their hands up in the air. They were getting joy and I was getting joy too. I knew they were acting like this because of my music and my mood.

I worked as a DJ for more than three years. It was the best job I ever had. I met a lot of people, I became popular, I played music for other clubs as a guest DJ, and I was happy. My happiness was to help other people to get this joy: the feeling that you have when you are dancing and moving and dreaming at the same time. Nowadays, they call this feeling ecstasy. I wanted to make people forget their problems for as long as they were under my music's influence. I know and I am sure that I was the best at it.

*Twenty-two-year-old **Nicholas Kafkas** was a student of Ginger Hurajt's in the spring of 2000. Before beginning his writing class, Nicholas says, "I could not express my ideas clearly on a piece of paper." After taking his writing course, he finds that he "writes easier" and that "writing is fun." A Business Management major at NECC, Nicholas also enjoys listening to music, playing soccer and traveling.*

Giving Back

by Catherine Gitschier

I have to say that the best job experience I have had so far is working for the Holiday Foundation. What the HolidayFoundation does is make and deliver holiday gifts to children and adults who are living in or have recently left a shelter. I started the Holiday Foundation as my way of giving back to the people who helped me when I needed it. The Foundation is not set up legally yet, but I am working on it.

One day I was forced to leave my home and everything in it because of a bad relationship. I ended up in a shelter where many wonderful people volunteered and helped my family get a new place to live. We moved into a nice three-bedroom apartment in Newburyport, Mass. When we moved in, everything we had fit in my tiny Mustang, including the six of us. I then signed up for some computer classes and soon got a good job as an administrative assistant in Newburyport. It took a lot of hard work, but about a year later, I had replaced all the furniture, dishes, and clothing I had left behind.

As I was walking to the corner store one day, I started to think about how happy I was. On the way home, I stopped at Dunkin' Donuts to sit and have coffee. A couple of minutes later, a girl from the shelter walked in. We started talking and she mentioned she needed help getting some things for Christmas for her children. Something clicked in my head, and I started picking up little gifts for her and her children. By Christmas, the car was full of wrapped gifts for them. I borrowed a Santa suit, got dressed, and delivered the gifts on Christmas Eve. Two of my children were dressed up as elves. We passed out gifts and sang songs. It was one of the best Christmas Eves we ever had. Seeing the big blue eyes and the giant smile on the little boy's face caused my heart to smile. While I was passing out gifts to his sisters, I noticed him lean over to his mother's ear and say, "Mom, why does Santa have boobs?" We burst out laughing. She had a good comeback, though. "A lot of guys have boobs, just like Uncle Kevin," she said.

On the way home, the kids said we should do this again next year. I thought that was a great idea except for one little detail: I was a single mom with five children. What little money I had we needed for food and bills. So we did yard work for my brother-in-law all summer and saved the money we made. I kept thinking, "Should I be doing this?" I was a little nervous. I thought I should be spending the money on my own children. But, my children love having a project that we can work on together because they get to spend more time with me. We have a lot of fun cracking jokes or just goofing off when we work together. Sometimes we have water gun fights or play monkey in the middle. I love knowing where they are and what they are doing.

We went to yard sales and shopped at Walgreen's, Target, and CVS the week after Christmas and Halloween to get things extremely cheap. Ten cents for a Christmas stocking; "What a deal!" I thought. I bought 53 of them. I spent all the money I had gotten for Christmas from my family. By Christmas, I filled all the stockings, and added the candy I got at Target. The candy was marked down after Halloween but didn't look Halloweenish. Just like the Christmas stockings, the candy was also dirt-cheap. I also got a very nice Santa suit at a yard sale—gloves, glasses, boots, wig, and all. I paid five dollars for it and still use it every year. We have come a long way since that first Christmas a couple of years ago. We now go to two shelters with about 150 Christmas stockings.

As I write this, I am in the middle of making 100 Easter baskets. I make gift baskets and Birthday Party Packs so I can sell them at church fairs and flea markets to get the money we need for supplies. The money for the gifts does not come directly out of my pocket as much now. I also have some help from time

to time from friends of my children and sometimes my co-workers. This experience has me talking to people from all lifestyles. I used to be a loner. Now that I work with so many people, I have many friends. When I look at this experience, I can tell you that I learned many things about myself that I never thought about before. One thing is that I am a wise businessperson. I buy things off-season after Christmas. A lot of giftware goes on sale dirt-cheap after the holidays. I make up baskets and sell them all summer to raise money to shop at Walgreen's, Target and CVS the week after Christmas or Easter and get the things I need for the following year. Last year I got about 50 Easter baskets at yard sales—some for a dime or 25 cents.

A friend of mine, who liked my baskets, told me that I should start my own business. I said to her, "Yeah, right. I could never make that happen."

"What do you mean you can't make it happen? You already have. You make these baskets and sell them all summer. Just because you don't have a store doesn't mean you don't have a business."

"I guess you're right," I said.

I have always wanted to open my own party supply store called Party Pax. That is why I am in school now. My product is a printed cardboard box that has everything in it that you need for a child's birthday party.

Another thing I learned from this job experience is how to coordinate. I am a very busy person with a full-time job, six children and two night classes. I have learned that I can no longer do this with just the children. I worked out a plan with my church. On the days I make the baskets, I use the church dining room for workspace. Then I have some high school kids who need to do community service help do the work. I just call a couple of days ahead. When everyone meets, most of the time we can finish in just one night.

I have also learned communication skills. One day the store manager at Walgreen's asked me what I was going to do with the 200 Christmas stockings I was purchasing. I told her what I did every year at Christmas and Easter. She said, "You do this with your own money?"

"Yes," I told her.

She was so impressed that she gave me all the stockings, 50 Christmas coloring books, and about 30 snow globes. She only charged me five dollars for all that stuff. Then she told me to come over and see her after every Christmas and Easter and she would give me a good deal on the clearance items.

That gave me the courage to ask another store manager. I wrote up a letter explaining what I do and what I needed and asked if they could help. Sure enough, I now have two stores that I can count on for help. I eventually would like to rent a building, where I can do all the work and store all the things I buy and make. The stockings and the baskets are starting to take over my house.

I love having the kind of job where I get to make the decisions and not just follow orders. While at the Holiday Foundation, the children and I get to decide what we need to do to build up funds. Once a month we have a meeting and talk about what we have to do to finish a project or how much money we have to spend. We also make sure we use the money properly in order to get the most gifts we can with the money we have. It is a big responsibility to make sure everything is finished on time, and we love every minute of it.

Many of my friends say I am crazy and ask, "Why do you do this? Use the money for your kids!" I tell them I would not stop doing this for anything. I really enjoy doing this because when we put all this stuff together, I spend hours talking with my children. Over the years, we have grown very close. Another reason I have chosen to do this job is the high I get when I see all the big smiles on the faces of the children when I play Santa or the Easter Bunny.

When I started the Holiday Foundation, I was a single mom who thought she didn't have any skills. Through hard work and praises from people I have helped, I have built up the courage and self-esteem to realize I have a great deal of skills. I just needed to know how to use them. Once I learned how to use my skills, I soared. I have gained the courage to go back to school. Right now, I am working on a business plan with a small local business center with hopes of opening a party supply store. Giving back to the people who helped us has turned into a life-changing journey for me. I just cannot wait to see where it is going to take me next.

Catherine (Cat) Gitschier, who, when asked her age, says, "I'm not telling!" was a student of Clare Thompson's in the spring of 2000. Cat has always enjoyed writing. However, after taking her writing course, she says, "Now I feel more confident about my writing." A Business Management major at NECC, Cat hopes to own her own party supply store in the future. Outside of school, she keeps herself busy as a working single mother of six and enjoys making crafts and baskets and attending yard sales.

This Stinks
by Tracey Ramsdell

You've been married for about a year now and up until recently it's been going pretty well. But, it's that time of week again and you're wondering what you're going to do because lately you've noticed your new husband can't seem to manage the one household chore that is exclusively his: taking out the trash. Well, take comfort, because you are not alone. After ten years of marriage, I have faced this dilemma many times through the years. I know these can be trying times, but there is hope. I have laid out a few tips you might want to keep in mind when trying to remind your husband it's that time of the week.

The first few years you might want to start off slowly, in a non-threatening manner. Remember, if he feels like he's being attacked or nagged, you will get nowhere. The day before the trash needs to go out, as he passes through the kitchen, you might want to say something like, "Gee, the trash is piling up." Or, "Does it stink in here?" I have found these little nonchalant reminders work wonders in the early years of marriage.

After a few years, though, you might find you get the usual grunt as he goes about reading the evening news. At this point you might have to redirect your effort from your husband to the trash. It is imperative that you make sure you have neat trash. What I mean by that is even the manliest man will get squeamish if he thinks he might get last night's spaghetti sauce on his hands. Push the trash down, pull up the sides of the back and tie it shut. In some cases you might even have to pull the bag out of the barrel. Then go about your nonchalant comments. Remember, never undermine his masculinity by making a remark about him being wimpy. You will defeat the purpose.

When this method is no longer doing the trick, he is at the point in the marriage when he has lost the ability to think for himself. This is normal. Years of you telling him what to do, down to what pair of underwear to buy, has made him dependent on you to tell him what to do. So you need a more direct approach. Ask him, "Honey, will you take out the trash?" It is useful to use your high-pitched, "You're my hero" voice when asking this question. If he doesn't answer right away, don't fret. At this stage of the marriage it takes men time to process what you've asked and even longer to form an answer. Don't forget, 'neat trash.'

Along about five or six years into marriage you'll find these techniques no longer work. At this point, you have to stop asking him and say point blank, "Take out the trash." I have found if you play on his ego, and make him think he is "all that," it is most helpful. Phrases such as, "It's too heavy" or "I'm not strong enough" will boost his ego just enough to get the job done.

Eventually there will come a time when the words you say will no longer be enough. You will have to physically do something. Don't get nervous; it's only temporary. Many happily married women have found if they place the trash bag in an inconvenient spot, it will motivate their spouse to put the trash in its place. Mind you, I have tried this myself. While my husband was sleeping, I placed the trash directly in front of the door, knowing he would have to move it to get out to work in the morning. To my surprise, I woke to find he did move the trash. Unfortunately, moving it to the other side of the entry was not what I had in mind. Don't get discouraged. This is just my own experience. Many women have had luck with this method.

When all else fails, and it seems you'll never get through to him, it's time to break out the "big guns." The following scheme (oops! I mean method) is a two-part process. First, you must take the trash

to the curb by yourself. I realize this could be painful, but just to be safe, do it two weeks in a row. After you have accomplished this, make an appointment at the local all-day spa for Saturday morning. When Saturday morning rolls around and he asks, "What's for breakfast?"

Answer him, "I can't make breakfast for you. I have an appointment at the spa."

Knowing this might put a dent in his wallet, he will probably ask, "What the hell for?"

Go on and tell him how you broke a nail and need a manicure, how your back is killing you and you need a massage, how the sweating caused your pores to clog and you need a facial, and so on. Don't forget to add how much each of these procedures costs. When this all sinks in and he finds that not taking trash out has put a significant dent in his wallet, well, let's just say your problem will be solved.

I realize you can't imagine your wonderful husband will ever get to the point where you will need to do any of these manipulations. I assure you that most of us matrons of marriage thought we married Mr. Wonderful, too. But the reality is that you too will succumb to manipulating your husband. I only hope these tips will help you to remind him "It's that time of the week again."

Tracey Ramsdell is a twenty-nine-year-old wife and mother of three children: Brittany, Brandy Jo and John Curtis. When asked about her occupation, she says, "I am the C.E.O. of a small family." Tracey was a student in Clare Thompson's Basic Writing class in the spring of 2000. Before taking this class, Tracey says of writing, "I felt as though writing was a process I had to do over and over again, kind of like housework." Now that she has completed her writing course, she feels herself "growing in confidence" as a writer. Outside of school and family commitments, Tracey enjoys coaching youth soccer and making arts and crafts.

How to Survive a Breakup (By the Breakup Queen)

by Janelle Apostolos

Have you recently had your heart ripped out of your chest and thrown out the window? If so, this may apply to you. Everyone has had his or her heart torn open sometimes. I've been there so many times the sixth one is free. So I like to consider myself a pro in the bleed-your-heart-out contest. I myself follow the Alice in Wonderland philosophy, which is "I give myself very good advice, but I very seldom take it." You are also probably one of these Alice followers. This philosophy is how I know so much about what I know. This is not always a good thing. Here are some philosophies and phases I have learned in *not* listening to my own advice to help you better understand your breakup and help you get through the process.

Phase one: when you first break up, there are a lot of mixed emotions on how the breakup took place. If the knife was gentle, but deep, then the first night pamper yourself. Have a banana split or a half-gallon of ice cream, who's looking? If you prefer, taking it to the gym or kickboxing is a great way to alleviate anger—that is if you're mad. Most importantly do not, I repeat, *do not* call him! Remember the phone is a no-no. If you think you may be getting back together you are putting yourself in a "please mop the floor with me" situation. Another important rule during this time is tell your friends, but do not tell your parents. Your friends forget; they like you because of who you are even though you make mistakes. Your parents, on the other hand, have just made your ex public enemy #1. They do not forget.

Do not stay up all night and cry. During this time you are entitled to your feelings. However, don't wallow in your sorrow. Do not dwell on how you feel. When you cut yourself, you bleed. Don't try to pretend it doesn't hurt, because it does like hell. Go out and do something. This does not mean drive by his house to see if he's home. Try to avoid this, because once you go out and do something you will be tempted to drive by, come home and hit *69 to see if he called. (Usually after a breakup the ex will not leave a message.) Just remember it's 53 cents per use.

This advice will differ depending on the length of the relationship and the feelings you had for him. I've gotten so good at breaking up and letting go it still hurts, but it's only for a few days. I can also still function normally. So some of these phases will be longer depending on time and how high you were when you were pushed. It's like falling off a horse; no one likes to do it, but after a few times you learn how to fall so it doesn't hurt as much the next time. It's the same thing in dating: all's fair in love and war, which is another way of saying nothing is fair.

If you have made it through phase one, congratulations. If not, I think you need to read those directions again. By this time, in phase two, reality has sunk in. You need to be able to go on and live without him, adjust. When you first wake up you'll remember you are not with him. Funny how the mind works sometimes, isn't it? Take your shower, have your coffee and make a chart. This often helps. If you keep track of the days with no communication with him this helps. It gives you something to make you feel better that you have made it through some days. After your shower it helps to look in the mirror and tell yourself, "I can do this today. I can do this tomorrow. I can do this as long as I need to do this." This should give you a little feeling of self-esteem. Sometimes it helps to write what you feel. Go to work as usual. Don't call him today as well. Keep yourself busy and talk to whomever you can. Remember this happens to everyone. Shopping always makes me feel better. However, this is an expensive cycle to avoid your feelings; only do it when extremely necessary.

During phase three things should be getting easier. Hopefully during your relationships you didn't trade in your boyfriend for your friends. If you did, tough luck. Men come and go. Friends are forever. You can't expect people whom you've ignored to come to you now at your beckoning call. If you did ditch your friends, try to rebuild the relationships. You should also count on your family in your time of need, just to stay busy, because you can't talk to them like your friends. Well, maybe you possibly could with cousins or others. Whether you have friends or not, during this time it helps to think of a few philosophies I have learned throughout the years.

Nothing lasts forever. Everything dies sometime, and becomes biodegradable unless it's plastic, and hopefully you are not. Just think, did you honestly think it would be not until death that you would part? The answer is usually no. Just remember you are still young and you can do a lot better. Do not think about what you did wrong. A relationship is two people so don't take all the blame.

Anything that doesn't kill you can only make you stronger. Think of all the pain you have endured during this time. Your heart will develop a harder scar tissue. Just keep thinking, "Bring on the pain." You want to handle this better the next time it happens.

Love is blind and so are you. He wasn't even that great. I mean all those annoying habits. The way he always forgot things you told him ten minutes ago, the way he looked in the mirror like he was lucky to have himself, and we won't even get into the toilet seat. You knew it all along. It just took a while for your heart to catch up with your mind. If you have made it through the last 18 or 19 years without him, why can't you go on now?

De-Nile is a river. You should not put down the way you feel by hating him. You know, and so does everyone else, that you still love him. You don't just decide you don't love someone anymore. Please, don't hate. This will make it easy for the next person who comes along to be treated this way. "Do unto others as they do unto you" is not always the best way to handle things. Sometimes the one who is doing is a real jerk, so why not be the bigger person? Hating is too strong an emotion to be wasted. The feeling sucks, we all know that. Hating is just an emotion to be placed in front of how hurt you are. This may work for a while, but what goes down must come up and it is usually when you don't expect it, so deal now and don't pay later.

Out of sight, out of mind. It is going to hurt, so let the pain be little less. Put away some things that remind you of him, such as the prom picture, flowers, teddy bear, and his stained sweatshirt that smells like him. (I said put away, not burn.) Once you feel like you can handle a little, take out one or two of those things. You may really want to give back the gifts. Don't—this is why they are given. Do not return anything until you think you can approach him in a normal manner and not jump on him and sob. Do not ask his friends if you run into them how he is. Do not tell them if they ask how you really are. This is the art of pretending. If you think you're good, everyone else thinks you're good, and why wouldn't you be?

If you want to be stubborn and not listen to these rules you may run into other problems. I don't know why I should tell you something else if you weren't listening in the first place, but oh, well. During this duration you may think that if you could just find someone else you could forget him. Not gonna happen. Don't avoid the rules by making someone else a victim. You will just wind up explaining later about how or why you decided to date him, and frankly, "So I could get over my ex" is not a valid choice.

Instead of doing this, do better for yourself. Take time to smell the flowers. If you don't have it, or you feel like you'll never have it again, flaunt it. I mean put yourself out there; be noticed. Take off the sweatpants, so to speak. An ex hates to hear that it's a shame he broke up with his ex-girlfriend because his friend saw her at the mall and she looked hot. This will make you feel better when you see other potential men looking at you. It makes you realize your ex has lost a good thing, and it's not your fault, so don't ever be sorry. Besides, you said you always wanted to lose weight and now you have—an entire person.

Remember, whatever your strategy, if you decide to go back with your ex—this is very important—*nothing* is the same. I'm not saying it will be bad; however, nine out of ten times the change is

for the worse. This is because there is a lack of trust that your heart will be put in a bad situation again. But do whatever your heart tells you to do, even if it's wrong. "Better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all."

I hope my breakup philosophies and information will help you now and in the future. Please do not listen to Alice, which was how she got where she was in the first place. Nothing is ever a waste, as long as you have learned something from it. Good luck.

The Breakup Queen, Janelle Apostolos, is a nineteen-year-old Liberal Arts major at NECC. She hopes for a future career in the field of psychology. Before taking Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course, Janelle knew that she liked to write but felt she "wasn't very strong at fixing what [she] wrote." Now, after taking her writing course, she feels like she is "getting better at finding [her] mistakes and correcting them." Aside from writing and schoolwork, Janelle also works as a part-time waitress.

Brushing Up On Painting Knowledge
by Ruth Ann McCashland

There is something about a room that has just been painted. It has a clean, fresh feeling that makes one think they are in a newly built home. For me, painting is relaxing and I like the feeling of pride I get when I'm finished and the walls are nice and smooth. If you want to achieve that feeling of pride, you must take time selecting the right paint. Having the right brushes and other tools is also a great help. Before you start to paint, prepare the room. Let me explain to you how I accomplish these three steps.

Selecting a color can be easy if you take advantage of the paint chips that are available in all paint stores. Paint chips are small samples that show how the color will look after it is dry. This is also a great way to choose a color if you don't know what color you want. If you know the color you want, but your are not sure of the shade, take several chip samples home. Tape the paint samples to the wall about two weeks before you plan on painting. Glance at the samples from time to time. Walk past them. Look at them from different areas in the room. How do they look at night and during the day? Tape them to different walls. What looks good on one wall may not look good on the opposite side.

If you are having a hard time making a decision, and you can afford to buy a few cans of sample paint, do so. Paint a square on the wall and over the next few days walk past the color you have chosen. If you like it, then step one has been completed. If you do not like it, you have saved yourself time and energy.

Talk with the sales clerk about the room you will be painting. If you are painting your bathroom, you will want a paint that can hold up to the steam of a long hot shower. If you are painting your kitchen you will want a paint that will not absorb oil or odor, and is easy to wipe clean. Talk with the sales clerk about what type of brushes to use. Rolling brushes work great if you have a large area that needs to be covered. Ask yourself, "Will I be comfortable using this brush?" "Does it fit well in my hand?" "How will I clean these brushes when I am done?" "Can they be used again?" Some of the smaller brushes are disposable. I find this to be great for baseboards and other trim work. Read the instructions on the tape you buy. Will it come off glass if you use it around the window? Will it take off paint when you use it on the walls? Paint stores sell a blue tape that is designed for painting and works great.

If you need to remove wallpaper before painting, allow yourself enough time. Stripping wallpaper and painting cannot always be done in the same day. The first time I removed wallpaper it took me two weekends because I had to scrub the paste off the walls. If you find yourself with the same problem I did, just remember to watch your language, practice patience, and know that the end result will be worth it.

Before you start to paint, there are many things that need to be done. I like to start by cleaning the room and removing smaller furniture. Several years ago, I painted my mother's bedroom and before I started, I moved everything but the dresser. Her bed was in the hallway and the lamps, bedside tables, and everything else that was movable was in the living room. Doing this took some time, but it made working and moving around easier. Heavy furniture, like my mother's dresser, can be pushed to the middle of the room and covered with an old sheet or blanket. Any type of cover is great if it protects from splashing paint.

Make sure the walls are clean and dust-free. It is not a good idea to paint over dust because it clumps the paint and does not look good once the paint has dried. A bucket of warm water, some soap and a good strong wipedown will get the job done.

Patch holes by using putty and a putty knife. Putty dries quickly and you can use fine sandpaper to smooth and create blending. Use a screwdriver to remove outlet and light switch covers. Then cover them with tape, since this helps keep the paint away from the wiring. Put tape across the top of all moldings, around window panes or any other part of the room that you do not want painted. If you think you have a

good steady hand and do not need tape, you need to swallow your ego and start taping. Removing tape is easier than removing dry paint.

If you do not have enough sheets to cover the floor or the furniture, stop off at the Salvation Army where you can buy old sheets or towels for a reasonable price. If you have a carpet, take caution and wipe paint up immediately. At my house, we do not have enough sheets to cover the furniture and the whole floor. This is another reason I like to remove furniture. If you will be using a ladder, put the covering down first and the ladder on top. Many ladders are made to hold painting equipment, but I like to keep everything on the floor to avoid disasters.

Put some paint into a small container. Using a brush, paint around the bottom of the room, coming up about three inches from the molding. This goes fast if you have taped. Do the same around the top of the room. If you are going to be using a roller brush to finish, you will need to paint the corners and around the light switches and outlets. Use the small brush to paint those places where the roller will not reach.

Roller brushes are great to use because they make the work move fast. Do use caution when you pour the paint into the rolling pan. Too much paint will splatter as you roll the brush. It can also run down the wall and leave a line once it has dried. Work a small area at a time. Pretend you are using a vacuum to clean the floor. Work back and forth with the roller, dipping it into more paint as needed. You will not need to work the roller closely around the perimeter because you have already done so with the smaller brush.

When you are finished, check the bottom of your feet to make sure they are clean and paint-free before you go walking through the house. (No, this has never happened to me!) If the brushes are not disposable, they will need to be cleaned and stored properly so they can be used again. You do not need to wait for the paint to be completely dry before you start the cleanup.

Put all the leftover paint back into the paint can and seal it shut by using a hammer or mallet. Put the leftover paint in a safe storage place. Throw the old covers back in the garage or laundry room where you found them. Make sure they have been folded, so that wet paint is on the inside. You can also remove the tape, but please be aware that you can come in contact with wet paint. Wash your hands and make sure they are paint-free before you touch or start to move furniture. Vacuum the room before you move all the furniture back, then put clean sheets on the bed. It is only right that a freshly painted bedroom have fresh sheets on the bed.

You do not need to hire a painting company to paint. Painting is not difficult, and neither is the preparation time. It is only time consuming. However, you must take the time if you want to achieve a nice look. Follow the steps I have explained above, dress in old clothes, find a good radio station, and allow yourself enough time to get the job done.

Having lived in Idaho for most of her life, ***Ruth Ann McCashland*** *is happy to be here in New England, where she has lived for the last twelve years. "I love the seasons here," Ruth Ann says. "Idaho has two seasons only: last winter and next winter." Now that she is here in New England, Ruth Ann is working towards a Deaf Studies degree at NECC and hopes to be an interpreter for the deaf in the future. "Writing has always been very difficult for me," she says. "I took Basic Writing with the hope of learning the secret of great writers." The secret of great writers, Ruth Ann learned, is "to rewrite, proofread, and edit, rewrite, proofread and edit, rewrite . . . ." Well, you get the picture. Outside of school and writing, she enjoys riding her bike and working with her hands. Ruth Ann is thirty-three years old.*

Growing With Music

by Craig Krasinski

Music is the medium that captures the inner senses of the mind and temporarily blocks out all outside noise. Our moods determine the style and lyrics while age usually determines the artist. Music can define who we are at the moment. Music is important to me. As I was growing up, I was able to tune into the subtle changes that music took on in the '60s, '70s, and '80s and apply them to the changes going on inside me as I was changing from young kid to rebellious teenager to young adult. In many ways, music was doing the same. The timing couldn't have been better.

In the early '60s, I was just turning 10 and was still innocent to the turbulence that was all around me. I was enjoying the idyllic love songs like Diana Ross's "Stop! In the Name of Love" and the Righteous Brothers' "Unchained Melody." Happy-go-lucky songs such as the Beach Boys' "Fun, Fun, Fun" and the Swinging Blue Jeans' "Hippy Hippy Shake" echoed everywhere. I was able to be a kid back then because this music let me be one. Marilyn Manson songs such as "Dopeshow" did not exist back then. Some say Manson's songs are loaded with Satanic messages and death wishes, but the point is, if you're a kid and have to think about this, are you truly being a kid?

The middle to late'60s was when I reached the impressionable years. This was a time in history when so many issues were clashing and happening all at once. Racial tension was in the air, the Vietnam War was peaking and dividing the country, and the peace movement was in full bloom. Edwin Starr had just written a song called "War" which asked the younger generation this question: "What is war good for?" The answer was in the next verse, "Absolutely nothing!" I became obsessed with this message. At the restless age of 14, when everything bothers you, it took very little for me to become a young reactionary. Watching the nightly news with its daily dose of war footage got to me, so three other eighth-grade friends and I joined the antiwar protests in Washington, D.C. We had listened to ThunderClap Newman as he sang, "Get together now because the revolution is here and you know that it's right."

If there was ever a time when musicians and their lyrics influenced counterculture, this was it. A song written by Scott McKenzie called "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair)" literally turned the city into a mecca of disenchanted youth. The verses "All across the nation we're a people in motion" and "There's a whole generation with a new explanation" prompted a search for an elusive utopia that was sadly never found. "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" by the Beatles, who were the most influential group in history, promoted psychedelic drug use. I remember this time so well; I found myself drifting and not knowing which group to join. Suddenly, everyone around me changed. My friends I once thought I knew were either druggies, hippies, or draft dodgers. How we survived this time period I still do not know.

In the '70s we all grew a little older and a bit wiser. The music began to tone down. The early '70s brought in a more philosophical view of the world. Religion began to surge among the younger crowd. Music again followed the mood of the nation. A song written by the Byrds called "Turn, Turn, Turn" was actually taken right out of the Bible, from the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3. The lyrics stated simply, "There is a time for birth and a time for death/There is a time for healing and a time for killing/ There is a time for love and a time for hate/ There is a time for war and a time for peace." A song by the group the Hollies, "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother," took hold. These songs promoted understanding the seasons of life and helping your fellow person when he or she is down in life. These thought-provoking

songs helped me to look at the world in an unselfish way. Unfortunately, I don't hear this message in today's songs as much as it should be.

The '80s saw the country shifting toward the free-spirit, "go-for-it" attitude. Gone were the causes for protest. The war was over, the oil crisis gone. A new generation was flexing its own personality on the music scene. Songs were made for the dancing generation. "Everybody Have Fun Tonight" by Wang Chung pretty much summed it up. I had no concerns, so I set my sights on the opposite sex. I was in my twenties and I wanted to "have fun tonight". It's amazing how times and music change.

Just like music, time doesn't miss a beat. It's now present time and the only partying going on now is by my teenagers. I have reached my mid-forties and the only causes I quietly protest for now are family, job, hair loss, teenagers, and economic ups and downs. New Age music is now my escape from all of this. Yanni, Craig Chaquico's acoustic style, and Loreena McKennit's Welsh music are now my listening choices. Even though today's music may never capture a turbulent era like the '60s or the '70s, it still is, even without realizing it, influencing today's youth.

Looking back at time, I was lucky to be part of an era in which music touched so many in so many ways. To try to explain it would do it no justice. Each period of my life was followed by a change in the nation. Each change also brought a change in the country's musical preference. I was influenced by the music of the time. I grew with the music and the music grew me. How lucky could I be!

*Craig **Krasinski** is a forty-five-year-old husband and father of two children–a son, Michael, and a daughter, Anne-Marie. Craig works full-time as a product evaluator at Baxter Healthcare and is hoping to earn a Business Degree here at NECC in the future. He was a Basic Writing student of Clare Thompson's in the spring of 2000. Before taking his writing course, Craig says he was "scared to write" and unsure if he "could put thoughts to paper." Now, after taking the Basic Writing course, he feels "much stronger" as a writer. "[This class] taught me not to be afraid of mistakes, but to just go forward," he says. Outside of his commitments to family, work and school, Craig also enjoys all types of sports and activities with his kids.*

Mozart Symphony
by Kim Fohlin

Last week I went to the gynecologist's office. The room was small and full of women and children. After I signed in, the nurse told me it would be a while because the doctor was running late. The intensity of the heat outside forced me to wait inside, so I walked to the chair next to the window and sat down. I tried to read but the cacophony from children in the room made it impossible. I leaned my head back and closed my eyes, trying to filter out the racket and centralize on the music. Soft classical music was on the radio station; Mozart Symphony #40 came in tune after a few minutes. The harsh noise around me seemed to dissipate. I felt like I was back in the music hall with Sister Symphony in my elementary years. Mozart Symphony #40, the music of life, has many facets that can place me in various moods with its distinct tempo and dynamic.

I still remember the first time I listened to this piece of music. That was the day I cried my eyes out in kindergarten when my father was late picking me up after school. I was in the music hall awaiting my father when Sister Thanh-Van came in. She sat down next to me, squeezed my hand, and wiped the tears off my face. She gently asked me if I would like to listen to music while I waited. Looking up at her gentle face, I quietly nodded my head. She smiled and gestured for me to come along. I followed her to the record player at the opposite end of the hall. She showed me various LPs and asked, "Which one would you like?" I was unable to recognize any of the covers. After seeing me shake my head several times, she finally said in dismay, " Is there any song you like?"

"Yes, may I listen to Vivaldi, please?" I answered. I still remember her reaction when she heard my reply. Her smile went away, her eyebrows lifted up and her eyes widened with amazement as they locked on mine. Suddenly I heard a crash on the floor. The LP had slipped out of her hand and broken into pieces.

Of course I didn't know then why she had reacted that way. I was introduced to classical music at a very young age by my parents, who are classical worshippers. They had me listening to it when I was still in my mother's womb. For as long as I can remember, we always ate our dinner with classical music in the background. As you can see, I was brought up with classical music and I didn't know any children's music at all, or any other kind of music except for classical pieces such as piano sonatas from J. S. Bach, violin concertos from Mozart, or *The Four Seasons* from Vivaldi. So naturally, when I'm asked what songs do I like, I would have to pick one of my favorites from my limited memory bank. Sister Thanh-Van, on the other hand, expected me to pick one of the children's songs as an ordinary child would.

As I helped her pick up the broken LP, she said to me, "Well, I don't have Vivaldi, but would you like a Mozart symphony instead?" I hesitatingly nodded and she took out a record from the rack and put it on the record player. It was a piece that I had never heard before. I later found out that it was Mozart's symphony #40.

After that day, whenever I was picked up late, I didn't cry any more. I would find Sister Thanh-Van and we would listen to music together. For the six years that I was there, I spent a vast amount of time with her. She always called me "My Little Vivaldi" and I called her "Sister Symphony." She taught me about many other great composers such as Beethoven, Handel and Pachelbel.

Sister Symphony also showed me that there are various facets to classical music. When I listen to a symphony, in some movements I might feel like water is rushing down a waterfall, and then it may change

into a softer euphony like water is rippling gracefully through the clouds. But when I listen to a concerto, which is written for a single virtuoso on an instrument such as a piano, flute or violin, it will create different frames of mind in different places. Piano concertos make me feel like I'm lying in an extensive patch of green grass next to a stream. I imagine tall evergreen trees are around me and I look up at the cloudless pale blue sky and listen to water as it wimples over the stones. On the other hand, the lilting sounds of the flute or clarinet concertos can make me feel like a bird soaring above the running river, making a slight dip, and then soaring back up again in one smooth movement.

During my six years in elementary school, time and time again, I listened to Mozart's symphony #40, but not until my last year did I understand its movements and moods completely. It represents that mingling of classic and romantic elements, which marked the style in the final decades of the eighteenth century.

This symphony has four movements. The first movement, in sonata-allegro form, plunges immediately into allegro molto. It is the most highly organized and characteristic of the four movements. First, the exposition opens with an intense theme for the violins that establishes the home key of G minor, followed by the development, which is brief and packed with action. This smoothly flowing tune is shared by woodwinds and strings. The music wanders far afield and proportionally races from one key to the next. The development is crowded by the transition back to the home key without slackening its course. Finally, the recapitulation follows the course of the first section, taking on a remarkably tender tone. The closing section energetically confirms the home key.

The second movement, an andante also in sonata-allegro form, is in the slow movement of a tenderly lyric nature. It represents the soothing thoughts that spring out of the whimsical, even the playful, to the tragic and passionate. In this movement, the exposition opens with the violas; second violins and first violins enter in turn with the first theme in the home key in E flat. Then comes the development where the horns provide a background for the strings. The theme unfolds surrounded by an abundance of ornaments. The graceful decoration of woodwinds—bassoon, clarinets, and flutes—transits back to the home key.

The third movement, in G minor, is a strong rhythm with overtones of humor, surprise, whimsy, or folk dance, but the mood might range from fairy lightness to demonic energy. The horn beautifully mingles its sound with the strings when the melody starts. Then the trio in G minor changes into G major to contribute to its relaxed mood. The oboe, flute and bassoon in turn enter the theme and gradually drive back to the home key. The movement recaptures the emotional tension of the first movement. This moment is remarkable for its strength and onrush.

The last movement, allegro assai, is a compact sonata-allegro form, abrupt and imperious. It is written with dimension and character to balance the first movement. It has longer and fewer notes, moves within a narrow range and is rhythmically quieter. The final movement's motive is to exchange in rapid succession by various instruments that crowd upon one another as they spin out a complex orchestral fabric...

Abruptly, a loud crying baby brought me back to reality. Looking around the waiting room, there were some more new faces. I hoped I didn't have to wait too long.

As time went on, I became familiar with music of other exceptional classical composers as well as other types of music such as New Age, from the outstanding composer Yanni, and marvelous singers like Enya and Loreena McKennitt. However, the Mozart symphony #40 will always be my favorite. This special piece gives me delightful emotions. It gives me such joy and brings back such fabulous memories. Music is my heart and soul, I can't imagine the world without music. It would be like a dissolution verdict to me. Where could I find the peace and comfort, as well as the many extraordinary moods, which it creates? When I feel down and drained out, what could I do for relaxation? Without music my world would come to an end.

"I like writing more than when I first started," says ***Kim Fohlin****, a student of Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course during the summer of 1999. In fact, after taking her writing course, Kim further explains, "I'd love to become a writer someday." Along with writing, Kim also enjoys reading, hiking, scuba diving and, of course, listening to Mozart's Symphony #40.*

You Can Run; Can You Hide?

by Steven Murphy

It's everywhere. Every right and left you take, it's right behind you. You look for a way out, but you just can't find one. What do you do? It's killing you. You can't run from it; you can't hide. It's following you. It wants you to stop and listen to it, but you don't want to. How can you escape this sound, a sound that is indescribable? Quick, turn there—maybe you can hide in that alley. It finds you, so you run and come to a dead end, stopped by one of those brick walls that you see in the movies. You begin to think that it's all a dream. Then you realize that it's not. You now have no choice but to stop and listen. After focusing on it and listening for a bit you realize that there is nothing like it. You have never heard anything so relaxing, so soothing. You wonder why you have never heard it before. You wonder what it is. Then you realize that you have never taken the time to listen. It's music and has always been in your life. You ask yourself, why? How can anyone live without this wonderful gift? How can anyone not notice it? It's so beautiful. In today's society, music is everywhere you turn. It's in the supermarkets, elevators, parking garages, even in public rest rooms. People use different music to relax, to focus their minds on something other than their stresses and their worries; I do myself.

I use music to help me when I'm stressed. I listen to many different kinds of music, but my favorite is rock. To be a little more specific, I like to listen to classic rock. I enjoy soft rock, alternative, oldies, classical, heavy metal, jazz, and blues. I don't feel as if all that music has the same feeling as some of classic rock does—although it does have feeling.

Classic rock came out of the 1970s and late 1960s. When this music was written, the Vietnam War was going on, inflation was at a high, and drugs were a major problem. Many songs of that era revolved around drugs and the artists who wrote some of those songs used drugs. The Beatles wrote a few that were popular; "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" was one of them. If you look at the title, it tells a lot about the song. The initials of the title are LSD, and that was the popular drug of the time. Hallucinating was an effect of that drug, and that's exactly what happens in the song. They hallucinate.

One of my favorite songs is "American Pie." Don McLean wrote it. I don't know what the real meaning of this song is, or if there is any. I have heard that there is a meaning to every line in this song. For example, one of the lines talks about "the day the music died." Supposedly, this is about the death of Buddy Holly. I have heard Don McLean say in an interview that there is no meaning to this song. It's just a song. I don't really care; I just enjoy listening to it.

Another of my favorite songs is "Space Oddity" by David Bowie. The rhythm and words to this song are, in my opinion, incredible. I can't really say that I have a favorite line to this song, but I do have a favorite stanza. It goes like this:

> Here I am floating round my tin can
> Far above the Moon
> Planet Earth is blue
> And there's nothing I can do.

Now is there any meaning to this stanza, or to the rest of the song? I don't know, but I do like the beat and the rhythm that it carries. The beat is slow and catchy, and it sort of has a repetitious rhythm to it. I think it is a great song and it is one of those I could listen to over and over again.

I listen to music wherever I can, but I mostly listen to it in the car. Most cars are equipped with radios, some with tape decks and compact disc players. If you are really lucky, you might even have an 8-track in your car. I don't have an 8-track player in my car, but I do have one at home. In the car, the radio

is what I mostly use. I do have a tape deck and a compact disc player. I don't like the quality of tapes, and compact discs are either too expensive or I'm too cheap to buy them. I just listen to the radio the most.

Some good stations to listen to for classic rock are WZLX, 100.7, and the Arrow, 102.7. These two stations play some of those great old tunes that you just love to listen to. They are those types of songs that, for some, bring back memories of when they were younger. I listen to other stations a lot, like MIX 98.5, Oldies 103.3, Kiss 108, and 104.1 WBCN, but the music played on these stations just isn't the same. I don't really know why I feel that way, but I do.

I feel as though music has a certain feeling and rhythm. I don't believe that every song has this feeling and rhythm. It takes a real musician to give that to the music. Classic rock and oldies are the kinds of music that have it the strongest. I can't really get into music that you can't feel the musician is into. I think that this is because they are the ones who can give it that feeling, and you can't give something you don't have.

Music is important in my life. I don't know much about some of the songs or "legends" who wrote the songs, but I do love music. I think that music should be a part of everyone's life, just as much as reading should be. Every child should have music in school; it should be part of the everyday curriculum. Since reading and writing is, music should be too. The history of music and how it evolved should be learned by children. When I was in grade school we used to have music class and I think that was one of the greatest subjects. Through music, children can learn about the different cultures of the world. Music has been around for many thousands of years and has evolved through many different cultures. Classic rock was one of those that evolved through a culture, and without evolution, where would we be?

With music ever evolving, time ever changing, and interests continuously growing, music will always be around. It will always be something that you can't escape from. It will be around every little corner and hiding in every little crack. Stop running and take the time to listen to it. Who knows? It may change your life forever.

Steven Murphy, a Business Transfer major at NECC, "despised" writing before taking a Basic Writing course with Mary O'Neil in the fall of 1999. However, now, after taking his writing course, he "enjoys" writing. Steven also enjoys skiing, biking, and cars. He is nineteen years old and hopes for a future career in the business field.

Vieques: Protesting for Peace
by Jose Ortiz

For those who have been active readers during the last fifteen or twenty years and for those who have been following the news, the case of Vieques is not an unusual issue. Vieques is a small and beautiful island, which is part of the municipality of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. As a matter of fact, this small island is located about seven miles off the east coast of Puerto Rico. There in Vieques, the U.S. Navy has been developing military exercises for more than fifty-five years. Do you remember Panama or Haiti? Remember Kuwait or The Malvinas? Or what comes to your mind when you listen to news that talks about Bosnia or Kosovo? The point is that the U.S. military has been exasperating people everywhere. They believe they are the world's police force! Now they are in Vieques and this is something I cannot understand. I believe the U.S. Navy should leave Vieques and allow the Viequens to live free of their military exercises.

The U.S. Navy sent a notice of expropriation of the island of Vieques to the governor of Puerto Rico in 1943. After this notice, the U.S. Navy established a bombing range and a military exercise area there. They decided to do so because they considered the island as the only suitable training site for naval forces deploying from the East Coast of the United States. They are not in Vieques to protect lives or to help the inhabitants enhance their living style. They are in Vieques to develop military exercises.

I am totally against these military exercises because they bring disturbance and disorder to the islanders. I remember last year, during a bombing exercise, an off-target bomb killed a civilian security guard and injured another four men who worked for the U.S. Navy in the military facility.

This accident caused the U.S. Navy to suspend the training, but it also created a bad atmosphere, so the islanders protested against the military exercises. These protests against the military exercises have also been in Puerto Rico. Besides the danger that these exercises represent, the Puerto Rican and Viequen islanders have long complained about the noise and the environmental damage to the island because of these bombing exercises.

In this point of view, the Vieques residents say that when the U.S. Navy is developing bombing exercises, the explosions and vibrations caused by the bombs cause the school buildings to shake. This problem affects not only the teaching process, but also the environment of the island itself. Imagine that you are attending classes at one of the schools in Vieques and at the time you are concentrated on solving a math problem or writing one of your papers in your writing class, BOOM! A sound like thunder makes your body tremble. Do you think you are going to continue studying well? I don't even want to think about taking an exam under these circumstances.

When they refer to the environment, they say the U.S. Navy in Vieques has had a damaging and merciless effect on the environment, including the ecology, the archaeological sites, the natural resources and the surrounding waters.

I understand there are some people that see the Viequens' protest as an insignificant issue. They say the U.S. Navy has been there so many years and because of the accidental death of a civilian, the U.S. Navy won't pack up their utilities and leave the island. They assure the Viequens they have to see the death of this civilian as an accident and that the exercises the U.S. Navy does on the island is a contribution toward the United States' national security. Despite this, I insist on saying the U.S. Navy should gather their weaponry, pack and go. The national security cannot be based on the killing of innocent people. I think the whole country is suffering because of the U.S. Navy. The protesters have a reason to protest. They do not want more civilians to get killed or injured due to accidental off-target weapons or errant bombs.

This accident led Pedro Rossello, the former Puerto Rican governor, to meet with President Clinton in order to know whether the U.S. Navy would leave the Vieques Island. President Clinton said

that the U.S. Navy would stay there for the next three years unless Vieques residents decided otherwise in a referendum. However, I think that the rallying cry for the peace and for the campaign against the U.S. Navy cannot stop until the U.S. Navy leaves the island.

But President Clinton is taking this problem a different way. He is sending two U.S. Navy ships to Vieques in order to remove the protesters from the bombing range where they have been placed. I consider this act as a misunderstanding. President Clinton knows well that the protesters have no weapons to fight against the U.S. Navy. I just don't know why he is sending these ships to Vieques. But protesters say if the U.S. Navy ships arrest them, then other protesters will take their places.

The situation in Vieques is not too different from the situation in Hawaii, or the Marshall Islands, whose territories were subjected to bombing to the extreme detriment of their islanders. Besides the problems with the military exercises and the killing of a Vieques civilian resident, the Viequens claim the island because they say the U.S. Navy-is destroying the island's ecology and its economic potential. Yet this is a situation the islanders and the Puerto Rican governor can stop by raising their voices and telling the world what is happening there.

The protesters want the U.S. Navy out of the island and they are right. This island belongs to the Viequens and the U.S. Navy must leave and turn the territories over to be used by Vieques residents as they want to use them.

The only solution I see to this problem is that the U.S. Navy needs to leave the island of Vieques and let those islanders live in peace. We need to know that we are living in a free country and Puerto Rico and its surroundings must live free, too. The Vieques residents deserve to live released from any bond or relationship with the U.S. Navy and its bombing practices. The U.S. Navy must understand that in a general condition there are poor relations between them and the community of Vieques. The Viequens have the right to do whatever they want to do with the 22-mile-long island. I would like to end by quoting Pedro Rosello's words when talking about this in the U.S. Congress, where he showed his feeling about this situation. He said, "I am not angry, but I am convinced that enough is enough." I feel the same.

"Before this semester, I felt unsure about writing...I thought I was not ready for this challenge," ***Jose Ortiz*** *explains. However, after taking Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing course in the spring of 2000, Jose says, "I believe that my writing style has become more powerful. . . . My instructor helped me to unveil the writing potential that was hidden inside me." Along with writing, Jose enjoys reading and working with computers. Currently, he is a Computer Science major and is hoping for a future career in computer programming. Jose is thirty-five years old.*

The Absence of Fathers

by Narda C. Pimentel

Through the decades, it has been believed that in all cultures the family bears the main responsibility for socializing a child from birth through independent adulthood. This is something which I think is true because a child first develops its physical and intellectual skills, such as walking, counting, and naming things, within the family. I also think the family is important because it teaches a child cultural values, norms and mores from the day the child is born. A family, in my opinion, consists of a mother, father, and a child or children. Do you think that a single mother raising a child on her own, without the representation of the father, should be called a family?

I strongly believe that two parents, a father and a mother, are better for a child than only one parent—mostly because a father has an important role in a child's development, and a father is also a symbolic presence for a child as its protector and as a role model. For instance, at play and in other realms, fathers tend to stress competition, challenge, initiative, risk taking, and independence, but at the same time the father is also stressing personal safety for his child. Another example is that while children are in their house playing with each other, they usually learn from their daddy that kicking, biting, and other forms of physical violence are not acceptable; in other words, they learn when enough is enough. Throughout American history, several studies have found that the presence and involvement of a father with his children seems to be linked with the children's improvement in quantitative and verbal skills, problem-solving ability, and higher academic achievements. This is something which I found has a surprising impact in the life of a child in today's society. Could you imagine how the lives of fatherless children will be in the near future?

There was a time in the past when "fatherlessness" was far more common than it is today, but death was to blame, not divorce, desertion, and out-of-wedlock births like it is today. It is devastating to think that our generation of children may be the first in our world's history to be less well off psychologically, socially, economically and morally than their parents were at the same age. More dramatic is to know that the decline of fatherhood is the major force behind many of the most disturbing problems that plague all cultures in today's society: crime and delinquency, teenage pregnancy, deteriorating educational achievement, depression, substance abuse, alienation among adolescents, and the growing number of women and children living in poverty. For instance, my best friend, Nelly, started to skip school and use drugs three months after her parents were legally divorced. Her mother tried to correct Nelly's behavior, but she couldn't because she was so busy working to provide for her family as a single mother. As a result,

Nelly was arrested for shoplifting, and two months after her release from jail she became pregnant by a drug user. Now Nelly is working and raising a child by herself. One day I asked Nelly what it is that she missed most from her childhood. And she answered with tears running down from her dark brown eyes, "My father is the only thing that I missed, not only from my childhood, but in my adulthood as well."

More and more, the question of whether fathers are really necessary is being raised, especially from single mothers of our new generation. This is hard for me to answer, especially when I am not a single mom and do not have any children. One thing I do know, as the daughter of a single mother, is that fatherhood is a social role that others, mothers, partners, stepfathers, uncles, aunts or grandparents cannot play. To decrease the high rate of fatherless children in our cultures, I think family members, especially women, have to avoid divorce, desertion, and out-of-wedlock births, to maintain united families, to save our future generation of children, and for the sake of society itself.

Narda Pimentel *is a married twenty-two-year-old native of Lawrence, who hopes to be a registered nurse and a math teacher in the future. Currently, she is a Nursing major at NECC. Before taking Carol Barron's Basic Writing course in the spring of 2000, Narda felt that writing "was something...[she] was forced to do." Now, after taking her writing course, she thinks writing is "great!" Outside of spending time with her husband, and working as a Certified Nursing Assistant, Narda also enjoys listening to music and using the internet.*

Latchkey Kids
by Nancy Byron

I am appalled at the number of kids in America who come home to an empty house after school. More to the point, I hate to see kids who are only eight or nine years old out on the streets because there is nobody at home to take care of them. These are the kids who get into drugs and mixed up with gangs. They are simply looking to fit in somewhere because their parents can't be bothered to take time for them. What is the matter with society today?

For instance, there are two kids who live in the apartment building next to me and they are only ten and eight. They get off the bus at about 3 p.m. and their parents aren't home. During the summer they are left alone all day. When I get home they would show up at my house wanting to play with my girls. I kind of feel bad for them and in the beginning I let them in my house to play, but they kept breaking toys and going through my stuff. It showed that no one had taught them any manners. So, I finally just gave up and told them they couldn't come in anymore. Sometimes I let my girls go out to play with them, but there was one instance when the boy next door kicked my four-year-old daughter because he wasn't winning the game they were playing. I saw the incident, but he lied to me and denied it. This boy is an eight-year-old and he is kicking a four-year-old girl because he is losing. That is pathetic and he should be taught some manners at home.

I can remember a case at the laundromat where a little kid was running around annoying everyone. He was about four years old. The whole time my friend was there, no one seemed to be with this kid and he couldn't tell who the parents were. As he was putting his laundry in his truck, this kid came out of the laundromat and ran into the street and was hit by a truck. The mother came out of the laundromat screaming. Where was she the whole time the kid was running around bugging people and how did he get outside and into the street without her knowing? If this mother couldn't be bothered to watch her kid in a laundromat, what does she do with him when she wants to go out? I have seen news stories over the years where a mother leaves her kids home at night to go out to bars. There have been cases where there was a house fire while the kids were left alone. How can people live with themselves after that?

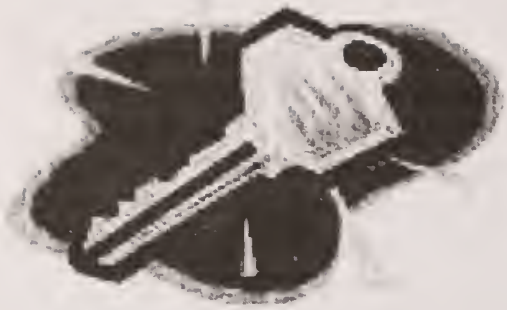
When driving down the street, I see kids who can't be more than seven or eight walking alone, and I wonder where the parents are. My oldest daughter is seven years old and I won't let her go down the street alone. Maybe I am overprotective, but I could never forgive myself if something happened because I wasn't paying attention.

I understand parents have to work, but that is no excuse for letting your kids run the streets and terrorize other people. Why do these people bother having kids if they are not going to take care of them?

I think that when a child is 12 or 13, they are probably ready to stay home alone, but depending on their level of maturity, they may not be ready to watch a younger sibling. This doesn't mean the parents can stop paying attention to what they are doing. As a teenager, there is more peer pressure and a lot of kids fall prey to that.

There are many programs designed to keep kids off the streets and out of trouble. If the parents cannot afford to put their kids in these programs, maybe they should take a closer look at their lives and readjust their priorities. Maybe they should work part-time or make arrangements for someone to watch the kids. There are too many weirdos out there to just trust that your kids will be okay.

In my case, I am very lucky. The company I work for lets me adjust my schedule as needed to pick the girls up from school. But if this wasn't the case, I would have my girls in an after-school program somewhere, so I would know they are safe. Or I would change jobs to be able to accommodate their school schedule. The kids have to come first.



In closing, I would just like to applaud all the parents who do give up some of the things they want to make adjustments for the children. And I would like to chastise the parents who think the kids will magically grow up okay, while they selfishly go off and do whatever they damn well please. The children are the future and if we, as parents, don't take care of them, who will?

Nancy Byron is married with two daughters. Originally from Post Mills, Vermont, Nancy currently works as a software engineer and is taking some developmental courses in order "to get back into the swing of school." After taking Mike Wilcomb's Basic Writing course during the fall of 1999, Nancy finds that her "writing flows much better." Aside from writing, she also likes to rollerblade and spend time with her family. Nancy is thirty-eight years old.

Once Gone, Gone Forever
by Edward J. O'Brien

It disgusts me to think that in my town, Haverhill, and others we will lose all our open space just to fill the pockets of a few developers. It's a case of overbuilding where there is no need for homes. I believe that we as humans should be very careful not to lose what we have by overbuilding because once you do it's gone forever.

It's our right as humans to be able to connect with nature at will and not have to stand in line at a park or travel three or four hundred miles just to do so. The response I think I would hear from builders is that they are just trying to make a living and feed their families, to which I would have to respond that so am I and my way does not take away from society. They should revise their standards and have more respect for the world. Just because they build, it does not mean they must be part of devastating each and every available space just as locusts devour crops and vegetation. What I would expect to hear from developers are some cold-hearted remarks about how land is money or something like that.

There was a time when building homes for cities that were in need of growth was an honorable and, to be honest, profitable thing—kind of like the gold rush. But in these early days of building it was more acceptable. I only say that because builders and developers did not just squeeze homes in wherever they could. Home building and development was somewhat planned and everyone had room to breathe in what seemed like a perfect balance of open space for people to live.

But now we are past that point. The point we are at now is perhaps one of near appropriateness that the intensity of building should be given over to other areas, instead of continuing to build here to a point of over-saturation—or worse.

Is the loss of our open space inevitable? I do not believe so. I think things can be worked out. Right now I am speaking at a personal level, meaning that I have lived long enough to see what can be lost. But this topic goes deeper than my own feelings and affects all of us. For instance, how do we explain to our children that what we had they will never ever have and therefore never understand? You can never fully explain how a field of wildflowers smells in full bloom, or how cool and refreshing a little unpolluted stream can be in the heat of summertime. No matter how good your words of description, you could never fully describe how it is to catch catfish in a hidden pond that only a few people know about and, the same as you, are not afraid to take a walk or bike ride off the beaten path. And how do you explain that it was all lost—not because of industrial revolution or great progress, but because of greed and non-compassion?

Everybody wants to have it all and so do I, but we cannot. We must have respect for others. Just look at what has become of our ocean frontage here on the East Coast. Is it right that only a small portion of people get to live on the water? And does it seem proper that the rest of us should have to be squeezed into small and crowded recreation-type areas? To me it does not. But that may be water under the bridge. If there is a solution, it should be pursued. But for now I would focus on what can still be saved and that is the open space in our cities.

When you rape and pillage the earth for the sake of money, you are no different than the worst of society. I've seen open fields filled with nature blooming brilliantly with wild flowers and then turned into parking lots. I've seen woods stripped of all their glory and mystery and convenience and liquor stores stand in their place.

I loved growing up in Haverhill. But what I loved about it the most was the wildlife that it had when I was young. I now have a strong liking for plants and trees, thanks to what Haverhill had to offer. Any time I read about an animal or tree I could find it in the woods of Haverhill.

As far as curbing residential growth, Haverhill seems to be at a point where someone needs to make a choice before it's too late. I think they are trying, but I don't think they are doing enough. Maybe they

need more help and support in their fight against developers. There is an issue right now about homes being built under the guise of affordable elderly housing. Haverhill, I believe, had stopped building unless it was for affordable elderly housing, but these homes will cost in the five hundred thousand-dollar range. I know the majority of retirees cannot afford to buy a home at that cost. Why should we build at all? There are lots of homes available in town.

I think right now only people who live in the city and currently own property should be allowed to build, as long as it meets the environmental and acreage qualifications and so on. There should be zero growth otherwise until we realize what the impact of growth will be. The whole situation is a little deeper, but that is where we should start. Now this may take years, but what is the hurry? The land will not spoil. I also think there should be large donations of land by the public and city for conservation areas and sanctuaries.

I have often seen the differences between people from the inner city and people who come from a town that provides more than a textbook knowledge of nature. What someone from the city may call woods, the ones who live outside the cities would mostly call a small park. There is no one perfect environment for growing that I know of, and I have heard people speak quite eloquently about living in a city. And, having also spent time living in a city, I would like to back them up. But, what is missing in a city cannot be duplicated. If you want to drive a couple of hundred miles, you can find it. As far as corruption, we know trouble is where you find it. A simple fact is that there is more opportunity for corruption in a city-type situation.

Buildings, bridges and other historical monuments to our past and to ourselves cannot always be saved, although we try very hard to do so. Time and money will always see to that, but the earth in its open and unspoiled state can and should be preserved as a monument of respect, not to ourselves but to the planet that we really call home. We do that by preserving the open space—so that our feet can always feel the dirt below them and remind us and comfort us in the fact that we are all part of one world and not alone, but one with nature. We cannot hope to make the earth better than it already was before we as a society came to be and we should never forget that.

A student in Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing course during the spring of 2000, ***Edward O'Brien*** *says, "I never gave [writing] much effort because I did not know how to start." But after taking his writing course, he finds it "much easier to get started by using prewriting techniques." Ed, a Computer Science major, hopes for a future career in computer programming. Outside of school, work and computers, he enjoys rock climbing and spending time with his wife Mary. Ed is thirty-eight years old.*